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FATHER BROWN ON CHESTERTON

BY

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TO
FRANCES

FATHER BROWN ON CHESTERTON

I

Having to write this book reminds me of a Phil May drawing in *Punch* round about the days of Spion Kop: a large man, oiled and curled, the oil being plainly machine-oil, sits down, uninvited, at a tea-shop table, where a small man is finishing his tea.

"I'm just after punchin' a fella's face for talkin' rot about Buller. What do *you* think about Buller?"

Hoping to avoid imputations of talking rot about Chesterton, I go forward. We met at Keighley in the spring of 1904, at the house of Mr. Herbert Hugill, who was a much older Chesterton fan than I was. (He had and, I trust, still has, one of the four copies of *The Wild Knight* which constituted the first issue of the first edition.) There we agreed to walk over the moor to Ilkley, where Chesterton was spending a short holiday, and I was his willing guide. The actual conditions for both of us were as near

the ideal as makes no difference: he was on holiday, having delivered his lecture to the Keighley intelligentsia, and I was in possession of the heart's desire, which was to talk with him. March was awaking and blowing the hair out of her eyes, and our bit of moorland is among the finest in Yorkshire, especially when white clouds race across the blue.

That prince of journalists, Wilfrid Meynell, when journalism still was a profession, had early drawn our attention to a young writer called Chesterton, author of a book of essays called *The Defendant*. After thirty-five years some phrases still resound: *A defendant is chiefly required when worldlings despise the world—a counsel for the defence would not have been out of place in that terrible day when the sun was darkened over Calvary and Man was rejected of men.*

And in the Defence of Penny Dreadfuls: *We lose our bearings entirely by speaking of the "lower classes" when we mean humanity minus ourselves.... But this is what we have done with this lumberland of foolish writing, we have probed, as if it were some monstrous new disease, what is, in fact, nothing but the foolish and valiant heart of man.*

Freud and Jung, note well, had not then swum into our ken, but Cesare Lombroso and his French kinsmen were making our flesh creep, until some wag got at them with a "skull of Charlotte Corday". (She only had one, and that wasn't the one!) I mention this because, in a few months from that date, March, 1904, Chesterton was going to be tickled to death about it all.

His lecture of the evening before our stroll had been on one of his dearly beloved aspects of Modern Thought, the guileless pretence at getting everything both ways: liberty without justice, ease without vigilance, Peace alongside of Push, the Palm without the Pang. And how folk would shout hooray! if you kept on talking like this: "Whilst avoiding the manifest difficulties of institutional religion, let us cultivate that nobler, broader atheism which allows for a personal God".

It must have been the reflection on this, i.e. everyone wanting everything both ways, that set me telling him a piece of secondary education which had come to me through living three minutes from the Bradford Casual Ward. I discovered, soon enough, that Old Stagers used to wait outside the Tramp Ward until they heard the Town Clock strike nine, so as to be able to tell me they were locked out. I told this to the tramp-master, a fine well-balanced sort of man, as he had need to be. He went on to initiate me a little deeper. "They do anything sooner than come here with children, because we keep them an extra night to rest the children. My wife gives children a good time and they need it badly, poor things. Aye, and some of them are stolen." Ignorant letters to the papers plead in favour of these vermin and against their victims.

I remember, too, telling a fearful story from the papers about a good-natured Frenchman who used to give alms to a woman with a wailing child, always at the same corner. He was hard-headed as well as good-natured, and the wail of the child used to haunt him. So he told a *sûreté* man, who arrested the woman. The baby was found to have a bandaged eye. Under the bandage was a walnut-shell, and inside the shell a spider, which had eaten a large hole in the little eyelid!

Moral: Never give money until you know perfectly who is getting it. The "never" may be modified by St. Vincent's inspired words: It is better to lose money than to lose pity. And he was a Frenchman!

As we crossed the canal before breasting the steep Morton Bank, Zola chanced to be a topic—I think I was recalling how Zola had offered money to a Lourdes *miraculée* to induce her denial of the miracle(!)—and Chesterton interjected that the *Daily News* Editor had blue-pencilled his recent classification of Zola as an "obscene Nonconformist". "Not", he went on, "that I ever thought Nonconformists obscene, only Zola! He would like to turn civilization into a drowsy Sunday afternoon, which is, I think, a Nonconformist ideal; and he made use of obscenity to advance the good cause of safety first in morals, economic ease in circumstances. Nothing heroic, risky, elegant, or quite untrammelled. That is all I intended, but I had not made it clear enough, I suppose."

II

By association of ideas, we got on to the curious itch for confession characteristic of those who patronize escaped priests, emancipated nuns and all that sulphuretted hydrogen ghost of expiring Protestantism. Twenty-five years before the "Oxford Movement" (Buchman, not Newman). The lark of it all, quoth I, is that these amateur confessors and penitents are barking up the wrong tree. Even those High Churchmen who tried to restore Confession in the Church of England were led into incidents untoward or comic, through lack of experience. We of the primitive obedience have been confessing our own sins for nearly twenty years before we begin to hear those of others. In sacramental confession picturesque detail is hopelessly irrelevant—it simply isn't done, and that is the only thing that varies the monstrous monotony of the catalogue of crime. For there are only ten commandments and only three or four ways of breaking them, so figure to yourself if there is any excitement in hearing confessions. The only excitement is a rare thing among thrills: it is the vision of a submerged soul coming up out of the dark night of ocean into the pearly radiance of the morning. No words will describe the glimpse of glory vouchsafed for a passing instant to a confessor half-dazed with repetitions and numb from the knees down. But I have been often favoured to the extent I try to picture.

That was all I ever said to him on the subject, but I feel bound to subjoin here an embodiment of the case in verse which I did for *G. K.'s Weekly* as a pendant to Paul Claudel's stark poem on Confession, translated in October, 1934. Though done thirty years after, it is worth reproducing here for its own sake, and the Priest's Soliloquy is only the steady experience of a lifetime, as witness my hand.

The priest, in whom priesthood clouds over the countenance live
and humane

Perturbs by the fact of his presence, our sly self-legerdemain:

The earth is a-quake with Christ's treading, a ferret the warren has
stirr'd,
A shuddering horror has traversed the swine of the Gadarene herd:
Black-Avis can't show on our threshold but we sense the reek of the
brute:
The possess'd one is troubled right inly to where the possession has
root;
And the Root, full of horror and fury has symptoms prognostic of
fate,
Sin's vomit essential, enormous, convulsively hiccup'd in spate.

Vain to keep anything back, keep that to ourselves at the least,
Vain to stuff down by main force, keep back in its den unreleased.
No way now to shirk the avowal, word for word, less fearfully
"guilty" to plead
With lips to that ear like the keyhole of justice with its unbearable
heed.
No more way than to hold back the babe ripe for birth, ripe sin in
dark matrix blot out;
There is the priest, here its moment to budge, unmask its
unspeakable snout.
Lazarus gives no more sign. Does he sleep? What could better
betide?

.

"Lord, hadst Thou been here our brother had not died."
'Twas not yesterday that he sickened: Ah! where wast Thou hidden
the while?
How have we to do when we need Thee, and where rediscover Thy
smile?
Oh! You Who to call us made silence Your trumpet, as others the
voice,
Must you needs so deal with your creatures that absence at times is
Your choice?

Mary is weeping, her brother is dead, but behind her on tiptoe one
steals,
"The Master is here and calleth for thee," at the whisper
despondency thrills:
The Lord will have thee explain Him how things have fallen, He
needs thee, I trow.
Thou art cited to court, Magdalen, from thee the Creator must know
What to do in the case, and He wants to consult the text of thy
woe!

Bring Me where you have laid him. I myself will e'en go the same
road,

I, Second in Trinity, the Father on foot in His Son's Person, God.
Take away the great stone; let My face feel the force of the
cavern's breath.

Even so in a careful entombment (for Lazarus was what they call in
easy circumstances) modern man is laid out at his death.

Science with reason, fine newspaper-stuff, things taught at high
schools in the town,
Uncleanness, injustice, sloth, custom, pride on top, like a cover
screwed down;
Trust only in things you can touch, like a close-fitting garment or
groove,
All has made of us something so free that a finger one hardly can
move.

Long-winded screeds of philosophy, mealy-mouth courtesan words,
have us swaddled and wrapt to the nape
Till inside is no more the live man, but a supine great doll,
ridiculous, trussed out of shape.
And...I may be mistaken—what say you? but by now it would seem
there's a niff, as of mortification as link.
After all, he is buried four days, and a shaky voice near me says:
Stink.

Lazarus brother lies there so still. His mother won't know him by
now.

Jesus stands at the edge of the tomb. He is groaning. *Infremnit
spiritu.*

Where the Three Persons Divine are bonded in union supreme
Even there pierces death's chill. Gospel says: He troubled Him.
Thomas lays finger on Peter, bids him the Master descry.
What! that Majestic Face! Nay, no error. He weeps just like us
when we cry;

How He loved him the Pharisees hoarsely tell one another, standing
by.

Dead man on the floor of the pit, hear again the commandment that
made thee!

From the father in need of his child not even the tomb can o'ershade
thee.

Death itself is no safeguard for thee if the voice of the Living God
call,

Rise, dark paralytic: rise up, rotting corpse, grinning skull, up ghost,
crime and all!

Out with thee, up with thee monster! Rise, brother, rise, son of
mine!

Lazare, veni foras!

FROM THE PRIEST'S SIDE

To be frank, this routine work is killing: boxed up here hour after
hour
Absolving the careless, the innocent, seems like a waste of good
power.
But stay, Peter's net is enclosing a something, a fish worth our
while,
He's heavy. With guilt? So it seems. But candid, denuded of guile.
Now the Lord in thy heart be almighty, and clear and sincere on thy
lips,
That so thou discover condignly and truly the tale of thy slips.

Not so bad as one sees in the papers. The scarlet is bleaching awain.
Ah child! were not God deep down in you, such things would not
touch you with pain.
If Omnipotence were not all-piteous, Justiciar of torment were He,
Self-slaughter the only religion. But He loves to restore and set free.
Go in peace. Mount for ever the stairway of Light unbeginning.
Henceforth
What ill thou hast suffered, good compassed, accrue to
imperishable worth.

And what have I done to deserve it? Dear God! so to see without
eyes
The haunted morass of corruption transfigured to young Paradise?
Tis Thy work, Thou Fount of Renewal! From its mire doth the mist
of our fen
Make the rainbow for ever that decks Thee. I know. I am witness.
Amen.

We discussed as freely as the March wind blew such matters as the pros and cons of frequent Confession. If everyone frequented the Sacrament of penance as much as mere pious authors urge, it would soon kill off all the confessors, but the modern practice keeps the track smooth, open, and safe. If people went to confess only great crimes, the C.I.D. might begin to haunt our churches after a murder or a burglary, and this would lead to heavier complications.

I had just seen Maria Monk, her book, still for sale on a Bradford bookstall, and told him that our people had seen it distributed free at the Bradford Mills (not all, but some). I had tried to read it, but had found it insufferably drab and of laborious invention, tired out before the race, as it were. So far as my experience of such literary efforts went, and I had had some original unpublished documents in my hands, it was the effusion of a tainted brain, an imbecile. This I recognized later in one of Chesterton's essays, where he closes the whole question with "Maria Monk, a dirty half-wit". Let me point out his terrible power of invective, not generally understood, because he seldom used it. And let us be again thankful for the fine charity which kept that weapon sheathed.

We even got on to the burning of heretics. Neither of us could bear to look on it as practical politics; neither of us could bear to apply a hot flat-iron to the soles of their feet, as I once in an hospital, pretending to be the visiting doctor, recommended very

loudly for a woman who was shamming epilepsy; but Chesterton was already convinced that something drastic was necessary for bad cases which could and did occur. Because the Christian Commonwealth is an institution; and the more prosperous and settled any institution is, even the most beneficent, the more venomously is it assailed, and often the venom is inhumanly occult and subtle. I instanced the famous heresy of the German Tyrol in the eighteenth century: how a Catholic peasantry became infatuated with the doctrine (a doctrine which depended on a wrong preposition) that in order to be saved you had to die just as Jesus Christ died. How whole families scourged and crucified one another, and over twenty thousand of all ages perished by crucifixion, protesting they felt no pain but perfect delight. It spread for twenty years, and government was impotent, since no punishment came amiss to the fanatics. It was just what they wanted. Finally an old bishop, I think, advised government to burn up everything the fanatics owned, clothes, *corpses*, farm-houses, furniture and cattle. That settled the question, and the mad religion disappeared. We agreed that there must be something in the burning that destroyed infection, though to burn things or people alive seemed needless cruelty—they could be burned dead, as was so often done in France. But witches and sorcerers were burned to prevent their remains being used in Black Magic.

III

From this I went on to relate some of my adventures. They had been the reverse of spectacular, but they got to the very nerve [1] of certitude—a double story.

Once in a Poor Law Institute I was invited by the Head to peep into the padded room where a very violent case was detained on her way to the asylum. She was attitudinizing in the middle of the room, but as soon as I lifted the shutter she stopped dead and glared right through me, like frozen lightning. My knees gave way, and I dropped that shutter as if it were red hot. Years afterwards, I was doing my morning round in a county jail. It was a lovely spring morning and the cell doors were all open, some of the women sitting outside, sewing or knitting. All was peace, almost joy.

The wardress led me into an open cell where a young and pretty woman was bent over a seam. She wore her prison cap with elegance. When I said good morning she lifted her eyes—*the same eyes as I remembered since the padded room*. Again my knees gave way and I longed to hide behind the wardress. I said something—anything seemed to do—and beat a more or less dignified but hasty retreat. The charge on the cell-door, which I read as I went out, was "*Obscene language and solicitation in Manningham Lane*".

The padded room in the men's side of Bradford's Imbecile Ward had been the scene of an occurrence which some kinds of scientists have no difficulty in explaining. A year after my first peep into the padded room, and three years before my

discomfiture in a dungeon-cell, the attendants were standing at the main entrance at 10.30 on a Saturday morning in April.

"Would you like to see something, sir? We're waiting for the doctor to see what *he* says." Just inside the portal the padded cell stood open. About nine feet square and twenty feet high, walls upholstered all the way up in smooth pigskin, and floor padded in the same material. Untearable except with steel claws. Fourteen feet up was a square window without any suspicion of ledge or handhold, smooth pigskin to the sash. The white clouds of uncertain glory were sailing across the blue, and plainly seen, for there was no window. Glass and sash and bars all were gone. "We've left everything as we found it, sir, for the doctor to see. Last night a madman came in in a strait-jacket. Nothing for it but the padded room. He made an awful noise all night, and at five this morning we heard a smash and then all was quiet. When we looked in he was gone. He must have sailed through that window and carried it with him, bars and all. He had twenty feet to fall outside, but it was soft clay just under and he fell *just under*; you can see the marks." I never heard the doctor's remarks, and I never heard that the man was seen again. Old stories of complete disappearance under uncanny circumstances, we all are wont to call legends. This is not a legend.

We reflected then that we were tramps, and began to philosophise on tramps. Not in the George Borrow vein, but more realistically, I went on to describe how a fine Monday after a bad week-end was the time to see them in their glory. During a bad spell they throng round the fire in the model lodging house, "pinching" one another's eggs and bacon and, of course, fighting about it. This is why you never see professionals out in bad weather, barring accidents.

A fine Monday morning is the time to watch churches and their poor-boxes. Every church ought to have a crypt, because a crypt is handy for storing things; because it keeps the building drier and preserves the floor from rot; and because the slot of the boxes ought to go down into the said crypt. I had recently been attached to two different churches. One had had its boxes broken and rifled of large sums, five pounds and more, because the parish priest trusted to his keys and failed to empty the boxes for months at a time. So insanely he decided to keep his church locked all day. This kept the boxes empty all right. The other church had "shoots" going down into a crypt. When we examined our crypt we found besides coin, long hooked wires, limed string, and nearly as many spent matches as coins. The human vermin had dropped lighted matches down the shoots, willing to burn down the town on the off-chance of twopence-halfpenny.

IV

Soon the exhilarating moorland air uplifted us out of these dark topics and we cheered the way with singing. There is a point on the high moorland where everyone breaks into song. Not that Gilbert could sing then, he was tone-deaf,

though most sensitive to musical rhythm or tempo. As years went on, he grew to appreciate a melody and even to repeat one, if not too subtle. He did reproduce to my satisfaction and retention an impromptu of Beachcomber at a sing-song. The rule was that nobody could shirk his turn when it came. J.B.M. looked inhibited, then inspired and, in the nasal manner affected by taproom artists, intoned:

In my gardin there are rowziz:
Rowziz red and violets blew:
In my gardin there is sunshine
In my gardin there is yew! (top note)
(Angry undertone) *Ya bloody worm.*

This in the second last year of his life. But that morning he was only in his thirtieth year.

He had written ballades at the rate of two in a morning under the influence of escape from work and change of air, and he was full of Baring, Bentley, and Belloc as well. Ballades had to be exchanged between the club members, and the Envoi had to insult the Prince, the more grossly the better. So it often happened that the Envoi was complete before the ballade was begun, and so it remains in some cases even unto this day. Another rule was that one of the stanzas had to be poetic in flight, with at least one best line. Three or four of Chesterton's ballades recited that day are to be found in his *Collected Poems*, one or two of Belloc's, one of Phillimore's (he was of the club), one of Bentley's, and one of Baring's, though I speak without the book, are to be found in the files of the *New Witness*. Shall we quote?

Some I could quote at length or nearly, others are fragments hauled through the sieve of memory.

I was always the elephant's friend. This he had done that week. Another:

Refrain: We shall be ready when the gods return.

Envoi

Prince, you look pale tho' girt in gold and red,
Through all your wealth a want I can discern;
What you require is clouting on the head.
We shall be ready when the gods return.

I think I will not hang myself to-day is in the *Collected Poems*, but it was written that week, at least I have always understood so.

A state of some unrest is brought about shows influence of the Boer War, Fleet Street, and the small rift in the Great Liberal Party which Lord Rosebery failed to mend.

Two more Envois I recall:

Prince, may I venture, since it's only you,
To speak discreetly of the Crucified!
He was extremely unsuccessful too:

The devil didn't like Him, and He died.

Prince, if you meet upon a bus
A man who makes a great display
Of Doctor Haeckel, argue thus:
The wind has blown him all away.

And why not one of my own, with ballade still unpondered?

Prince, with your whistle so perpetually wet,
Against yourself you've weighted all the scales.
Unless you mend, you can't expect to get
As near to Paradise as Cumbrian vales.

From Bentley, afterwards printed in the *Eye Witness*, a ballade of the B.P., I quote the last verse:

They speak of England as a moral wreck,
Stone-deaf, and blind to all reality,
Her mind asleep, the usurer on her neck,
Her God forgotten, and her history.
They say: Shall these things perish utterly?
These that were England through the glorious years,
Faith and green fields, and honour and the sea?
I simply wag my great long furry ears.

Envoi

Prince, they deride your purse, your pedigree,
Your taste in pictures, wines, and clothes and peers.
These things make no impression upon me,
I simply wag my great long furry ears.

And all I can recall of a very topical ballade of Chesterton's own, about which he was at the time fairly blithe:

Why is my head covered with curious hairs?
Why is the sun still rising in the East?
Oh! why do stallions mostly mate with mares?
And why is bread so often made with yeast?
When those Raid Wires were pawed about and pieced,
What is that one whose text has not transpired?
Now Charteredds have so painfully decreased
I think an explanation is required.

Why noxious animals must hunt in pairs
Is not made clear by saying: Mark o' the Beast,
When Sergeant Sheridan sought balmier airs,
How were the wheels of his wild chariot greased?
"Hmm Hm." Yes, doubtless, as you say, the priest

Forced on a darkened world with fear inspired
Wild explanations. But to say the least
I think an explanation is required.

The Raid in question is the Jameson Raid. For the nearest thing to an explanation, see *The Autobiography of Sir William Butler*.

Sergeant Sheridan was an Irish policeman who himself committed agrarian outrages, and brought men in guilty of them on "police evidence". One man was still doing time and another had died in prison serving a seven-year sentence when George Wyndham, as Chief Secretary for Ireland, had the matter looked into. Even then he had to find four hundred pounds of "Government money" to provide the travelling expenses of the Sergeant! G.W. was fairly indignant about it all, but "not in a position to explain".

There appeared in the *Eye-Witness*, years after, a ballade worth preserving, which keeps the rules of the Club with one startlingly splendid line. It was not given that day, for it was not yet written, but I may mention that it begins:

O you that dwell where City slush and grime

and the last two lines before the Envoi are:

Hearing below bridges o'er the giant slime
Returning rivers to the ancient sea.

Envoi

Prince, is that you! Lor' lumme, oh gorblime——!
(I too resume the speech of my degree)
O crikey Bill! Lor' luvvaduck, well, I'm——!
Returning rivers to the ancient sea.

This is perhaps the most gleeful of all the glad Envois. Unless we except some of the envois that never had a ballade before them, such as Belloc's, quoted that miraculous day:

Prince, do not let your nose, your purple nose,
Your large imperial nose be out of joint:
Although you cannot match my "special prose"
Painting on vellum is my weakest point.

And

Prince, you are ugly, old, and rather low,
Extremely bald, and very nearly blind:
The women hate you, and they tell you so,
But do not let it prey upon your mind.

He quoted also, though it was not yet in print, the matchless lonesome Envoi in the essays *On Nothing*:

Prince, draw this sovran draught in your despair,
That when your riot in that rest is laid,
You shall be merged with an essential air,
Dear tenuous stuff, of which the world was made.

The stately beauty of it! of saying:

Prince, you amount to nothing, and you know it.
Let it comfort you, even as it comforts us.

So came we just in time for lunch to St. John's, Ilkley, opposite the best-kept church in the world, St. Margaret's, unto a house of the open door, to the guest and the wanderer free. It was shepherd's pie for lunch. Mrs. Chesterton was there. She was so pleased to see Gilbert return in good order and good form that she made me free of the *ménage* ever after. It is to her that we owe the most and some of the best of Gilbert Chesterton. In all things she was his angel, a small Cockney, a connexion of the first editor of *Punch*. She even converted him from what he calls the Higher Unitarianism to the more loyal and rational kind of Anglicanism—Tractarian more than Ritualistic. She was educated by the nuns of Clewer. On the father's side she was Huguenot, of the family of de Blogue, anglicised unsympathetically into Blogg.

V

A part from shepherd's pie, what I remember of that meal was Gilbert saying in a debating voice: "If my father had been a Duke, instead of a—NICE MAN—I should have gone to Oxford, and learned at great expense the insane optimism of the idle rich". From this the talk wandered on to enquiry as to what made the rich man's optimism so insane—does money destroy the mind—even so, does not the mind make the money which annihilates it—are the rich always idle—how do they lose the industrious habit which made them rich? And so on. We played with the idea. How does a rich man understand getting up in the morning when he has it done for him as far as is physically possible? Naturally he drinks and is drunk much sooner than the poor man, not merely because he can pay for more, *but because all his corks are ready drawn*. So we worked our way back to the truth of the Gospel as to the hideous peril of hoarding the unearned increment, because it rots the human container. Ill fares the land, etc., we quoted, and:

*Ah Maud, you milk-white fawn, you are all unmeet for a wife
You have but lain on the lilies and supp'd on the roses of life.*

In a minute it was tea-time, or so it seemed. Because, after lunch, Mrs. Chesterton told me of the Epic in contemplation, of which a deal was already composed. Alfred's vision was given as a sample. Then as a *bonne bouche* the description of the illuminated manuscript: *And suns, and spouting whales*.

With little pictures red and blue
Keyholes of Heaven and Hell.

I am careful not to seek the printed page for verification, but I write as I recall the words after thirty-odd years, and above all:

Her face was as a spoken word
When brave men speak and choose
The very colours of her coat
Were better than good news.

All through the ensuing year Gilbert kept planning and adding to the Epic of Alfred, now extant as *The Ballad of the White Horse*. Mrs. Chesterton cherished it very carefully, I could see she was more in love with it than with anything else he had in hand, and my own unfeigned delight in the "samples" was a help to the composition (I hope).

I am ashamed to think how little pressing I required to make me stay to dinner that evening, but so it was done. The master of the house came home from business, a man in ten thousand for charm and integrity, as we often proved in small things and in great. Francis Steinthal, Bradford born, of Frankfurt ancestry and the Israel of God. I speak with strong persuasion, for once, at his table, when we were drifting into mischievous merriment at the expense of one of the neighbours, nothing spiteful, but of the horseplay order, he pulled us all up sharp with a "Now, none of that". We felt safe in his shadow ever after.

His house was dedicated to the Beloved Disciple whose emblem surmounted the hearth in the midmost room of the house, a William de Morgan enamel, over peacock-coloured tiles by the same craftsman. The house was planned by Norman Shaw whilst he was engaged on St. Margaret's Church opposite. A broad staircase led up to the lounge; on the right was the drawing-room and on the left the dining-room. All these apartments were of noble proportions with big furniture designed for each. Space, comfort, elegance were all achieved painlessly, a cure for self-consciousness. Perhaps the talk was influenced by the surroundings—I have never known more lively or lengthy discussions; and one evening a newly-trained virtuosa from Frankfurt, Vera Dawson, gave us the Bach Great-Organ Fugue, redacted for the piano, gave it with such exact *tempo* and fine phrasing that it could be followed from start to finish as an intellectual treat. They were the great days of Bradford music, dimmed by the Great War. But that was about 1906.

The first evening I had to leave early, being under a certain green-eyed observation which passed away, as bad things do, some two years later. I scarcely think I was Father Brown that day at all, though Chesterton on the moor above had been admiring *Trent's Last Case* and expressing an ambition to increase and improve the breed of detective stories. Up to that time there had been no C.I.D. in fiction, save only Conan Doyle's Sherlock and that wonderful man Andrew Lang. [2] I wonder who knows his detective stories now? He never touched what he did not adorn, and was there anything he did not have a try at, from pulverising Anatole France to uprooting the Golden Bough?

VI

It was the next time Chesterton came to St. John's that I was bidden to spend the day with him. It was late autumn, and perhaps he had already started *Father Brown*. The length of my tether was more generous, and I stayed well after dinner, and met the two young men who looked in for coffee and occasioned the *Brown Epos* after my departure, as the *Autobiography* puts on record.

A third invitation was to dine and sleep, and it was certainly later than the *Wisdom of Father Brown*, because there was a deep plot to capture a likeness for the dust-jacket of the *Innocence*. As soon as we sat to table our host addressed me a kind of challenge: what case could be made for Home Rule for Ireland? Since I knew he was a Home Ruler (his wife became a Sinn Feiner in 1919) and since Chesterton had often expressed himself to the same effect, I sailed ahead with the remark that except Poland, Ireland was the only Christian country not allowed to govern itself. Say that they had abused their opportunities and that they had themselves to blame, and all that, no nation could possibly deserve to have a Government which could only be called an ignorant spasmodic interference. Even India had more self-determination than Ireland, and on the whole, less ignorant interference.

It was in the course of that monologue that I told some of those things which appear in *The Crimes of England*. It was my grandmother who always apologised to the company for having spoken of a soldier, though she had a grandson who described himself as "champion broncho-buster to the smartest squadron of the smartest cavalry of the smartest army in the world". Grenfell's, I think, of the Ninth Lancers.

And so the ball rolled, but my memory is over-laid with mystification, because I became aware of two young ladies opposite who seemed to be watching me too closely. One, Miss Maria Zimmern, was scribbling below the table, and the daughter of the house was looking at me and then at the scribble with amused interest. It really was the portrait of Father Brown for the dust-cover of the *Innocence*, and was as near to a likeness as most such feats. The whole thing *was* a plot, but it was quite a year before I saw it. For I am a bit of an owl, always was; and the creation of Father Brown came from the fact that I noted and chronicled small beer, whereas Chesterton was the very opposite. He never forgot anything he heard or read, but he never remembered what day it was, or if lunch were still to come. As for me, even when I smoked cigarettes, I could always find the ash-tray. This to Gilbert seemed miraculous! But he always kept his power of wondering.

His wife told me that he often took her breath away with his power of recalling. Whilst dictating an Introduction to Thackeray (it might have been Milton) he interjected: "As Miss...remarked..." She assured me he had only been strolling through the lounge after tea when he casually over-heard Miss Blank, and Mrs. Chesterton could only aver that it must have been nearly ten years before. "He must have read ten thousand novels for Fisher Unwin before he was twenty-two, and I

guess he knows all the plots and most of the characters yet." I tested this the same day at Beaconsfield:

ME. "Do you recollect passing for publication a novel by Dr. William Barry, called *The Two Standards*?"

G.K.C. "Let me see.... Oh yes! that's where the Rector's daughter goes atheist through reading the Book of Job, isn't it?" Yes, it is.

He remembered people less by name, face, dress, than by what they talked about. There he had them by heart. "The lady in nigger-brown? If only she had *been* a nigger-brown——" "Gilbert, don't be absurd, the one who couldn't take Indian tea." "Oh yes! she was vaguely looking for a society to prevent cruelty to vegetables. It made her sick to think of all the sufferings of cut flowers. Only she didn't seem sure enough to put any money into it."

VII

My native talent for detection was of the slenderest, but it appealed to Chesterton's faculty for wonder; as thus: we discussed on the first day of our meeting, the pros and cons of mathematics versus literature in education. I pointed out in the spirit of gaiety, how a mathematician would put two and two together and the result would be four, whereas your writer or man of letters would put them together so as to make them twenty-two. Great kudos was mine in an Irish school when I pointed out to the master (we were swotting up *The Lady of the Lake*, and I was eleven minus), how FitzJames, noting the great sword which fell in the night, concluded that none but Douglas would have any use for a brand like that, and that he, FitzJames, had taken refuge in the lion's den. At an English school to which I had been transferred at twelve plus, I was conscious of a perturbing habit of seeing right through the silly poses and transparent pretences of the new chums. The only cant practised in Irish schools, I found, was the patriotic cant. The others, we conclude, would not take in anyone. Not in Ireland, but in English schools, the boys *learn* from one another transparent artifice, and so they grow to be what ignorant foreigners call hypocrites. It should be humbugs. All this I told him. The flat hat is true to life, but it perished in its prime, for it was wrong as wrong for my style of architecture. The large and cheap umbrella was my defence against wearing an overcoat, and the sapphire cross figuring in the first of the stories must have been a reminiscence of my boast that I had just bought five sapphires for five shillings. One was very deep, so it must have been of good water. Brown paper parcels! I carried them whenever I could, having no sense of style in deportment.

Long after, ten years and the War intervening, I was introduced to a smart young International Crook as Father Brown. He and his confederate vanished within twenty-four hours. They had been getting valuable rare editions from the London booksellers, using the American Consulate in Bradford as their reference. A good

man in the trade warned the London people, and not too soon, after the two had *spurlos versenkt* two hundred pounds' worth of rarities. *Magni nomini umbra*.

Chesterton must have been working hard at Father Brown, because later in the first year his wife laughingly warned me not to let him pick my brains. To such brain as I had he was always welcome, even to the pick of it. But I cannot, even in my inmost consciousness, discover the beginnings of any Father Brown stories. They are wonderfully well done, and that is my feeling on a second reading. At first I found his idiom strange—there is often a lack of mellowness in his proper names, and his material circumstances are too suddenly introduced as I thought then, but I am less fastidious now.

Call it the spring of 1905 that I came in to St. John's from over the moor, where I had been pondering things in Chestertonian key. It is the business of a true contemplative to hand on his harvest of a quiet eye, so I at once informed Gilbert that I had decided against all drinks except wine, because it was the most vegetarian, more so than beer or whisky. Milk was disgustingly animal. It did not take him long to write:

I will stick to Port and Sherry
Because they are so very
So very very very vegetarian.

He laughed "frequent and free" and right into the treble clef; and, when I remarked on this, Mrs. Steinthal, who had the child-portrait in her drawing-room, told me how his voice stayed so long high-treble that he was taken to a brain-specialist, who held forth to the following effect: This boy must be preserved from mental shock or strain. He has the largest and most sensitive brain I have ever met with, and it is even chances whether he become a genius or an imbecile. Fortunately, there never seemed to be any inclination to the imbecile. But being a somewhat spoiled child after this verdict, he in his younger days was obstinate and inclined to sulk, and we took care not to give him occasion.

It is but fair to say that he never tried to impose his will or to refuse his best; the only sign of imbecility was an inability to cross or disappoint or refuse anyone. So he promised you what he had already promised me, and his wife admirably kept his appointments and adjusted conflicting claims. In the Battersea flat a baize board, taped, was behind his head where he wrote, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and such. All invitations and engagements were stuck there under a *loud* inscription: LEST WE FORGET. One of Belloc's early odes was pinned to this:

Frances and Gilbert have a little flat
At eighty pounds a year, and cheap at that,
Where Frances, who is Gilbert's only wife,
Leads an unhappy and complaining life:
While Gilbert, who is Frances' only man,
Puts up with it as gamely as he can.

But we did manage to forget at times, and the episode in the *Autobiography* has more than one double. It was Charles Rowley of the Ancoats Brotherhood who once received a wire, reply paid, from Snow Hill Station, Birmingham, on a Tuesday morning: "Am I coming to you to-night or what?" Reply was: "Not this Tuesday but

next Wednesday." What affected Rowley was the thought that, for all he knew, they might be sitting up for Chesterton in Newcastle that night. Much depended on the health of Mrs. Chesterton, which just then gave ground for anxiety. He was most dutiful and obedient to orders, but they had to be written ones and backed by the spoken word. He brought his dress-suit, oh! with loving care, to Bradford on Sunday for Sheffield for Monday, but a careful host found it under the bed in Bradford just as his train left for Sheffield. Sent at once it was to Beaconsfield, where it landed at 5 p.m. on Thursday, just allowing him ten minutes to change and entrain for London where he was wanted to attend at the dramatisation of *The Man who was Thursday*. Scene at Beaconsfield: What on earth have you done with your dress-suit, Gilbert? I must have left it behind, darling, but I brought back the ties, didn't I? The darling wrote at the end of this narration: "Never, *never*, NEVER again must Gilbert go away without me."

At home or abroad, courtesy was with him both a passion and a principle; it was a new thrill every time to see the vast mass of G.K.C. nimbly mobilising itself to make room or place a chair or get out of the way. He was very often late in tumbling to the situation because of his habitual abstraction. There is *atmosphere* as well as pure fun in the *ben trovato* story of him giving up his seat to *three* ladies in the bus. Call it mooning, but he never mooned. He was always working out something in his mind, and when he drifted from his study to the garden and was seen making deadly passes with his sword-stick at the dahlias, we knew that he had got to a dead end in his composition and was getting his thoughts into order. He had two of the finest sword-sticks I have ever seen; one got worn out and the other got lost. He would lurk inside a doorway in the costume drama of his dreams, waiting for the Duke of Guise, or some adversary of the moment. He was arrested by the Ilkley police for pinking the forestry, but released when it was found that he was staying with a local Justice of the Peace. See his column in the *Daily News*.

We sent him a prize Wensleydale (cheese) for Christmas: it was at home to callers while it lasted at Overstrand Mansions, and gave rise to an essay in the *Daily News*. I believe it also inspired Belloc to a strophe or two of special prose in praise of cheese.

It was at Overstrand Mansions that I saw Max Beerbohm's cartoon of Belloc converting Chesterton from the errors of Calvinism. The conversion was almost complete, the pint pot being nearly empty. A special dedication in Max's hand I do not remember verbatim, but it was a paragraph in the Chestertonian manner to the effect that scoffing was true worship, and the Yah! of the rude boy in the street is but an act of reverence, being the first syllable of the Unutterable Name!

It was from the Battersea flat that we went to a "Lords and Gentlemen" dinner at the Criterion, Gilbert being called back by his wife, who was ill in bed, to see if he was wearing a clean collar, and he wasn't. We took a cab to save time, and about two hundred yards from the restaurant he kept the cab nearly half an hour waiting while he visited the hairdresser. Showing that he took a purely metaphysical view even of cab-fares. The Union Debating Club were holding their annual dinner.

G.K.C. in his speech referred to sitting on a policeman's head. Having to reply for the Guests, I warned Chesterton that for him to sit on a policeman's head would be at least manslaughter, unless the head were as bony as one whom I had seen in the witness-box at the Assizes. Police evidence may be true, but any I have heard is too

carefully prepared and has a made-up look just like a well-considered lie. How a stupid magistrate can discern a true police-story from a false one seems one of those things which no fellow can understand. Lord Justice Vaughan Williams was the guest of the evening.

VIII

His brother Cecil must have come to St. John's, Ilkley, for a few days in 1907. I try to keep a rough chronological order in the sequence of our intercourse. It must have been the spring of 1907, because the 1906 Election was well over except the shouting. ("O Lor! Padre, what price A.J.B.? Our *broomsticks* are sweeping them!")

Gilbert was full of that magnanimous ease which usually follows upon our side winning, and Cecil went calmly about showing him that only a new crop of wild oats had been very successfully sown. Cecil was a rare, even wonderful mind; for him victory and defeat were but episodes in a campaign; he was a veritable Bayard of debate, clear and dauntless, and he put into his thought and diction that lucid vehemence which in most of us (not excluding the present writer) turns to defects of temper or of statement. As barrister he must have gone straight to the Woolsack, if going straight leads anywhere. Not so plain as Cardinal Logue, he was plain enough, and thickset and sturdy: plainer than Gilbert, though I feel bound to say that a gentle lady, who had taken a good deal of trouble to be asked to meet us, and had put off more luscious meals to join at ours, lost her appetite completely when she set eyes on G.K.C. This was at Heckmondwike.

You could call Cecil a Tory Fabian—his "Gladstonian Ghosts" is a reprint from the *Fabian Review*. His later articles ought to be put into book form, for he is Cobbett come again, only better. He is the reason why Gilbert was never afraid to debate with anyone, nor ever wholly unprepared, except for a debate in America on Fundamentalism which he was not out to defend. The adversary began by scuttling Noah's Ark and scouting Jonah's whale with all the brilliant ignorance of detail and forensic skill which is mistakenly used instead of evidence. Chesterton had really been getting ready for hard stuff, and put up a cardboard sheet against that ancient snowball. He was too well prepared on that occasion in America, as he told me after his second visit.

It was a grand full dress affair with Clarence Darrow, which Gilbert, feeling that he was responsible for America's immortal soul, had really prepared with care, loading himself to the muzzle with such deep points as the absurdity of a series that does not begin and therefore cannot end, questions that do extend the mind. But it was Ingersoll and water, a Flood in which the critical point was the capacity of Noah's Ark, and another Flood when all depended on the incapacity of Jonah's whale.

How Cecil contended with him that day can best be gathered from a few sayings in

Gladstonian Ghosts:

"There is no historical ground for regarding the Liberal Party as the friend of the working classes. The Liberal Party is historically an essentially Capitalist Party."

"The humane capitalists will not attack us if we remain peaceful and unaggressive. Perhaps not. One does not muzzle sheep."

"The commercial instinct, unless subjected to energetic and unsparing State supervision, is certain to become a cause of ruinous social disorder.

"Lest I should be accused of 'sitting on the fence' (a phrase much beloved by those who always want to have judgment first and evidence afterwards), I may as well state definitely that, in my opinion, a protective tariff, if framed by genuine reformers solely in the public interest, would be decidedly advantageous to Labour.

"The only logical conclusion of the Passive Resistance policy is complete Anarchism—Anarchism from which the Liberal ideal sprang, and in which it will end."

An instance of Cecil's gradual conversion of Gilbert that afternoon may be quoted from "The Modern Martyr" in *All things Considered*:

"Undoubtedly, as a fact, Dr. Clifford is quite honourably indignant with what he considers to be clericalism; but he does not prove it by having his teapot sold; for a man might easily have his teapot sold, as an actress has her diamonds stolen, for personal advertisement.

"Mr. Massingham appears to have eyes and ears for nothing but the diabolical wickedness of Imperialism. Dr. Clifford, once the rising hope of Collectivist Dissent, is now too busy promoting sectarian anarchism to pay any perceptible attention to the condition-of-the-people question.

"We have drained our countryside and betrayed our agriculture, to a great extent deliberately, in order to obtain this vast city proletariat. Its condition is appalling; it is starved at school, overworked when it is just growing into manhood, and afterwards drifts into the ghastly backwaters of our towns, now sweated, now unemployed, always an open sore, a contamination, a menace to our natural life. That is what fifty years of applied Liberalism have made of about a third of the English people."

Fancy what reading this sort of thing would make for Gilbert in the new and golden dawn of rejuvenated Liberalism. Chinese labour was to be drowned in the scorn of a triumphant democracy, etc. Chinese Labour did by no means drown.

Gilbert was no ghost, but he walked and walked all that day round the big dining-table, having it out with Cecil. From luncheon to tea, from tea to dressing-bell they both held out. Gilbert got the worst of the argument, but all I remember was the number of times he said: "What I mean to say is this". Cecil had chosen his case, Gilbert had only inherited his. But, in the end, they shared the thunder, and Cecil diluted his Fabianism and Shavianism with Catholicism, being received into the Church some ten years before his elder brother.

"The vision is always a fact. It is the reality that is often feared. As much as ever I did, I believe in Liberalism. But there was a rosy time of innocence when I believed

in Liberals" (*Orthodoxy*, 1909).

IX

G.K.C. was heroically faithful to Democracy. Being myself on the side of the angels I used to amuse myself at teasing him with occasional objections. He had written long before in *The Wild Knight*:

But now a great thing in the street
Seems any human nod
Where shift in strange democracy
The million masks of God.

Meaning to say that his democratic principles transcended political theory and were rooted and founded in Divine Charity, which is quite beyond reason and all reasons. He would agree with me that Conservatism had the best case and the worst advocates of any cause whatever, but that, says he, is because the advocates are so much drawn from the aristocracy, who are choked with the riches and pleasures of this life and so never come to the fruition of anything. Their case is the case of the people all right, but which of them *really* knows, or cares?

Then I would point out that it is a monstrous unsure basis for anything, the notion of equality. It is so confused with similarity in value, static or dynamic, whereas their mothers could testify that even twins were not so equal as they looked. But he had it pat already, that this error led to levelling down, whereas the true equality was a mystical fact, only divinely revealed, that all men are equal only in the sight of God, and so those who had no God could only make a hideous mess with this very secret instrument of reform.

Then I quoted Sieyè's famous but forgotten aphorism that you could not be free until you were just; and how could the mass of men evolve justice, which is the perfect balance of conflicting rights, every right being perfect in itself, especially to the owner of the right; so perfect, in fact, that it perpetually obscured the vision of any other right? Of course, said he, nothing can ever bring about true freedom except stark, undiluted, and omnipotent Christianity. This led to our joint aphorism, for I certainly swear that I said it first: Christianity has only failed where it has not been tried. [3] This appeared a year or two afterwards on a wayside pulpit in Ashley Place, Westminster, for he used it in a lay sermon in Lent at St. Paul's, Covent Garden.

Before I quit the point, let me note that in *Ways and Crossways*, Paul Claudel draws a wide distinction between ideal justice or Divine Right, and material justice or commercial right, which has to be commutative or give-and-take or else goods could never be exchanged in fairness for money, but only bread for bread and shoes for shoes and twenty shillings for a pound. That is merely ideal.

When I instanced that the mistakes and excesses of any form of government could be capped with worse disorders by the people, he would distinguish between the people at rest and the people driven mad. And anyhow the people could repent, and did so, much oftener than the kings. Besides, the people start from zero whereas their governors have all the advantages to start with, and throw them away as they go. Lord Acton says that history contains no instance of a man being improved by power.

All our reasons led to the one conclusion, that the business of Church and State, the only business worthy of their efforts, was to aim at making people fit to govern themselves. And what splendid things in the process, even the failures could be! As for instance? says I: the failure of Savonarola produced St. Philip Neri who reformed even Rome, and Michelangelo, who built St. Peter's. Worse luck says I, for the old St. Peter's was more interesting. Michael himself wept to see it pulled down. Thus did we fill in the hours between lunch and tea. But there were other fillings.

As, for instance, the need for authority. A mob is a mob, helpless and useless without authority. If the authority comes from the mob, then is the mob "an army straight with pride", which it never is. Therefore, etc. But the mob may choose its rulers. It may, but does it ever? In turbulent times the rulers are self-appointed. The mob thinks it appoints them, but anyone who gets near enough to the seat of power knows that intrinsic fitness is indispensable, and the ruler has to rule by his own will and intelligence. Great men are often thrown up to meet the occasion, but does not Revolution devour its own best men first? I instanced the general contempt for the French National Assembly when they got to voting themselves cloaks and plumes to conceal their distressing incompetence, whereupon appeared Napoleon, the First Consul.

All very fine, and quite true, says my Gilbert, but it does not kill the case for Democracy. Because the people do not create authority; that is from Above, with a big A, but they have the right, first and last and all the time to say who shall hold that authority. They cannot abolish the sovran Seat, but who shall sit in it is their affair. Thus did we slake the ever-smouldering question, noting that every uprising against authority, whatever be the pretext, results in harder and heavier pressure on the people.

Therefore, as in Carlyle's best passage, true guidance in return for loving obedience is properly, if he knew it, the prime want of man. And the two arms of the Cross by which alone is salvation, are the Obedience unto death, and regard for the poor.

Obedience is quite beyond reason, therefore it is of divine revelation. Conversely the idolatry of freedom is the highest reach of civilised reason and has made lunacy of all political systems. For it is liberty of disintegration, the sacred right of starving to death, as Carlyle calls it. Liberty is given us only to exchange for something useful. So the Libertarian is merely a professional smasher who loves to distraction the fun of beginning all over again. Rebellion began all evil, it cannot begin all good, no matter how it reasons. Therefore, God came on earth to do the most hopeless mad thing, to teach us obedience by object-lesson. There is plenty of authority to force us so long as swords are keen and swift or scourges heavy. It is obedience that is scarce and has to be supplied from the Infinite Obedience of the Divine Sonship.

The other arm of the Cross of Salvation is regard, consideration for the Poor. It is the whole business of the new life to which we are born of water and the Holy Ghost. No trouble in talking like this to Gilbert, he was always ready and willing to give anything to anyone according to his need and even more so, and especially regardless of the needs of G. K. Chesterton.

Now the poor do not deserve all that consideration and assuredly will never repay it. That is why they are poor. As we well-to-do people in great things incalculable have need of the Infinite Compassion, so the poor in millionfold small annoyances need our large consideration. They cannot be taught to spend money wisely any more than a man can swim until he has water. They are poor just because of their abominable foolishness about money and goods of any kind. So our superior prudence and wisdom are their sole resource. And our penury towards them is their sole instruction and of this there is never any lack. Except that the only Son of our common Father warns us that excess of penury will more certainly than anything else in the universe bring us to dwell with everlasting burnings. The just judge gets quite vicious about this.

You cannot escape by leaving them things in your will. Your charity must be as untiring as their childish wastefulness, to which there is no bounds but the scarcity of things to waste from day to day.

These two arms of the Cross are the balance of the world below, and it does suffer from nausea, does it not? That is, from lack of balance. But we did agree that industrial disputes would never end so long as dividends were the aim of industry; because wages also are a dividend, and the work-man's two hands were his investment in the concern and much more a part of him than my loose cash is of me. Anyhow, it is monstrous to expect him to have higher ideals than mine in running the concern. We both serve Mammon, and it is quite absurd to appeal to God if we fall out.

But obedience unto death is the soldier's claim to everlasting life, and is the political arm of the Cross; whilst care for the poor and indulgence of their shortcomings is the Economic or Social arm of the Cross.

X

It was round about this stage of our acquaintance that I began to be solicitous that G.K. should cease to spread and dissipate his gifts on daily papers, and begin to print on handmade paper with gilt edges. In other words, to go in for Literature, as we understood it. In spite of knowing all about the bitter cleavage between William Ernest Henley and Robert Louis Stevenson on this very point, we small folk were incorrigible. But the Great Man held on his rejoicing way, and his wife intervened with a wisdom higher than ours. "You will not change Gilbert, you will only fidget him. He is bent on being a jolly journalist, to paint the town red, and he does not

need style to do that. All he wants is buckets and buckets of red paint."

As if to correct my tendency to gird at the democratic ideal, I was compelled to narrate to him one of my "seizures", call it a wave of intuition. He always seemed to welcome anything I thought fit to say, more and more so as we met. I hope I did not presume on his large hospitality of mind, which more and more delighted to entertain my random remarks as I made them.

Once on a quiet evening in a Yorkshire village street, I had a sudden vision of the PEOPLE, their immeasurable power in repose, their endless patience, and how like the sea their serenity. With this the dreadful folly of those who presume upon that patience, as also of the insane pride of politicians who trouble that mighty rest for their own personal fads, under whatever name they hide them. How all the storms, all the movements failed to improve their lot in any of the ways pretended, so that their only comfort was really the hope of Heaven: So that whatever injures or destroys that hope is the inexpiable wrong which brings calamity to all and sundry.

I remember that I began by saying lightly that none of us could be great men but for our leaning upon the little ones; could not well begin our day but for those who started theirs first for our sakes, lighting the fire and cooking the breakfast. Hence the promised word of final cheer: Well done, good and faithful servant, the high patent of nobility, conferred by Him Who chose to serve through the Father who had given all into His hands. And more to this effect.

The Ballad of the White Horse was then on the stocks, and this was the passage written that evening, between dressing-bell and dinner:

And well may God with the serving-folk
Cast in His dreadful lot.
Is not He too a servant? And is not He forgot?

Did not a great grey servant of all my sires and me
Build this pavilion of the pines, and herd the fowls and fill the vines,
And labour and pass and leave no signs save mercy and mystery?

For God is a great servant, and rose before the day
From some primordial slumber torn;
But all we living, later born, sleep on and rise after the morn
And the Lord has gone away.

For who shall guess the good riddle, or speak of the Holiest
Save in faint figures and failing words,
Who loves, yet laughs among the swords; labours and is at rest?
But some see God, like Guthrum,
Crowned, with a great beard curled,
But I see God like a good giant that labouring lifts the world.

Wherefore was God on Golgotha slain as a serf is slain,
And hate He had of prince and peer, and love He had, and made
good cheer
Of them that like this woman here go powerfully in pain.

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...But it seems to sing of a wilder worth,
A time discrowned of death and birth,
And the kingdom of the poor on earth come, as it is in heaven.

But even though such days endure,
How shall it profit her?
Who shall go groaning to the grave with many a meek and mighty
 slave,
Field-breaker and fisher on the wave, and woodman and waggoner.

Bake ye the big world all again
A cake with kinder leaven,
Yet these are sorry evermore—
Unless there be a little door,
A little door in heaven.

These lines follow the section named The Harp of Alfred, which contains some of the best lyric *thinking* in all the literature known to me. Wagner is a penny trumpet in this unique tournament of song, in which the sensual Pagan, the poetic Pagan, the savage Pagan, and the cultured Pagan say their say with music, before Alfred says the say of Christian Fact. I wish I could claim any suggestions of mine as occasioning such immortal lines, but the nearest I can remember is that I made merry at the expense of My Lord Macaulay's phrase about burying one's blighted love in the solitude of the cloister. If there was one place where blighted love or anything of a blighted description would go mouldy sooner than elsewhere, it would be the cloister. It needs a strong and hopeful disposition to be anything but a nuisance in the cloister.

I had still earlier held forth to him on my favourite seventeenth chapter of St. John, the inmost shrine of revealed religion. Did this, I wonder, result in a new verse?

The meanest hind in grey fields gone
Behind the set of sun
Heareth between star and other star
Through the doors of the darkness fallen ajar
The Council eldest of things that are
The talk of the Three in One.

"I have glorified Thy Name upon the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.

"And now glorify Thou Me, O Father, with Thyself, with the glory which I had before the world was, with Thee."

Only in the supreme moment of the Battle of Ethandune can I trace any other moment of our intercourse. I did one day enlarge on the beauty, as distinct from the accuracy, of the Latin Vulgate, how in lots of passages it was as good as an original, as in the Psalm *Notus in Judaea Deus*, hard to beat for sonorous music:

The God that heweth kings in oak,
Writeth songs on vellum,
Confregit potentias
Arcuum, scutum, Gorlias!
Gladium et bellum.

I apologise for so much of the first person singular, but it was much clearer to me than my share in Father Brown, that I had inspired or suggested many things to Chesterton which he had taken up beyond my best surmise. I was confused, and then transfused with sober delight, when one July evening at Overroads, Beaconsfield, he put the whole MS. of the Ballad into my hands, and Mrs. Chesterton explained that I was to censor it, as so much of mine was in it. That, if I remember right, was the great occasion on which I was presented to some jolly undergraduates and to Miss Maisie Ward, as Father Brown; and dreaming suspicion became waking certitude. They were thrilled with a few quotations from the Ballad, and were among the first to read it in print. I feel sure that it was the same set about a year afterwards, that pointed out how Alfred's left wing faced Guthrum's left at the Battle of Ethandune. How keen these young blades be! Many stray Napoleons are doubtless yet about. I wonder how many eminent strategists have discovered this? But as Chesterton had done it, he could not be "fashed" to put it straight in a second edition.

The whole epic of Alfred began from a dream he had at Battersea. He dreamed this verse (before Ethandune):

People, if you have any prayers,
Say prayers for me:
And lay me under a Christian stone
In that lost land I thought my own,
To wait till the holy horn is blown,
And all poor men are free.

A dainty thrill it was when one evening after tea at St. John's, during the children's hour, his niece, Gertrude Monica Oldershaw, aged six, and called *Wooz'l* for short, stood between Uncle Gilbert's knees to recite:

The Christ-child lay on Mary's lap.

I am glad to recall the scene, small and brief and very quiet, because it left a company of grown-ups moist-eyed and tongue-tied as at the end of a mighty symphony.

XI

When he was doing his book on Shaw, we had an undress debate on Shaw, at St.

John's after tea one fine afternoon. Curious, that I can remember where some of us sat in the central lounge. I wish I could as well recall all that was said. We debated about the Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant, Gilbert leading against Shaw. The feeling of the meeting was that the Plays could not be among the Classics of Dramatic Art, because they were Shaw's personal opinions and vigorously counter to average sense or common experience in the main. We made an exception of *Candida*, which is of immortal beauty, since the eternal Woman in the end cuts all the knots with the Mother instinct. Thence we rambled on to account for Shaw's sharp habit of putting right things wrong amid so much setting wrong things right. All the Irish are cantankerous about something, "same as the English", said the Irish present. But Shaw more than most, because he was a Protestant in Ireland, bred in contrary environment and born in opposition. So that his mental vision was impaired or crooked or squinty. Strenuous protest was registered by a dear old retired colonel who disclaimed all this on behalf of Irish Protestants of whom he himself was one. What charming Irishmen Protestants can be is well seen from the case of Samuel Lover. Even if he invented the Stage Irishman, Dan O'Connell patented him. But it is treated at length in the book on George Bernard Shaw, which made them fast friends ever after. And those who have known Shaw intimately are agreed in his own idiom that "he isn't half sich a blaggard as he wants to let on". This after thirty years' trial. But in the book it is all worked out exquisitely (1910 c.) on pages 39 *et seqq.*

Nearer to 1930 than to 1910 it was my good luck to listen to a week of Shavian Drama, and to be much persuaded of the perfect ear of Shaw for the spoken word. It appeared to me that he could "get away" with almost anything by sheer beauty of diction. About one week later I came upon an amateur performance of Chesterton's *Magic* and was startled to find his dialogue even better than Shaw's. At Beaconsfield in the autumn of that year I told Chesterton my findings. "Strange you should say it," quoth he; "Shaw has been telling me the same thing, urging me to go in for play-writing. He says I could do it so much better than himself."

He was, at the time of those words, engaged on a new kind of play, and one half was laid out, he told me. The first part a "Costume Melodrama" in which all the characters do what the author intended them to do. Then a Franciscan speaks an interlude, introducing the same play but with every character having a will of his own. It was to be a super-Pirandello. But only his literary executor now can tell us if it came to anything.

XII

His intuition was so great and clear that it is well for us all that his good nature and goodwill to everything human has been greater still. Of our talks on spiritism and kindred subjects I shall speak presently. This seems the right moment to recall the incident in *Magic* where the red lamp changes colour. A lady from Switzerland who had never read a line of Chesterton and certainly never had heard

of the play, told me in 1919 (*Magic* ran for three weeks in March, 1914) that she in her own home had seen a stranger blow out the electric light! He had done it to prove his powers, powers which put her back up completely. He was the head of the German Secret Service among neutrals, I understood her to say, and handed round little pictures like postcards in which all the figures moved about! I say the tale as 'twas said to me. I certainly recognised his description in the daily press at the time of his death.

I had always been a hater of sham ghost stories and a collector of real ones, noting how untrue stories give themselves away, whereas true stories do not vary very much, but keep the rules of the spirit-world. Even lawless spirits cannot vary their antics very much, being restricted, for demonstration purposes, to rapid transport and quick transit. So that if the elect can only keep their heads, they are not taken in. It is even possible to cow false spirits by superior will and courage, so that they cease to perform. All these points and more we used to discuss together at length. How Sir Walter Scott picked up some correct details from his perusal of ancient chronicles, e.g. describing Michael Scott in his tomb at Melrose:

High and majestic was his look
At which the fellest fiends had shook, etc.

This and many another "natural law of the Spirit World" have been verified by the Psychical Research Society, but our grandmothers could have told us, if we had not been busy ignoring evidence. William Crookes and Andrew Wilson had done their scientific best with mediums and manifestations, and Godfrey Raupert had given invaluable testimony from the very inside, when Gilbert came to lunch with me at Heckmondwike in the May of 1911. I chanced to mention that the Sacred Congregation of Rites had just condemned the use of the Planchette, after forty years of carefully weighing the evidence. He told me then how he had used the Planchette freely at one time, but had had to give it up on account of headaches ensuing. "Were they in front of the head or at the back?" said I. "At the back," said he. "But after the headaches, came a horrid feeling as if one were trying to get over a very bad spree, with what I can best describe as a bad smell in the mind."

"The beginning of despair," I diagnosed. "The demon tries to get at the grey matter of the brain, so you have to be passive as the first condition of producing 'phenomena', and this passivity has long been discountenanced by the Church even in the prayer of quiet. We must never abandon our will to an unknown power, because there can be no guarantee that the power is beneficent, and, besides, God has given us ourselves in the will, and to give ourselves away to any but Him is the beginning of the reprobate choice. I think it mechanistic theology, the old teaching (never formal, but common in bad sermons), that there is for everyone a last grievous sin which settles our eternal fate, as in Judas' case. But perpend: Judas began very much further back than that to prepare his final choice. So that it is on the whole balance of good and evil in a man's career that his eternal destiny depends."

An Italian waiter in London once, in a slack hour after luncheon, opened with me a discussion on a point which he said mystified him very much: Did the balance of good and evil in the world always remain much the same, or did the world have a

swing of the pendulum from good to ill and back? I gave it as my opinion that the balance must be generally equal, but that the Smart Set sometimes made evil fashionable. Hence, woe to the rich! Because no matter how ill-behaved are the poor, they have not time to gloat on evil nor to preach it, whereas the rich——

This, of course, was duly reported to Chesterton, in the hope of provoking discussion. But we agreed so perfectly that we could only confirm each other in our persuasions.

On another occasion we were together in the drawing-room at St. John's very snugly after tea when I started to orate about the *Messe Noire*, its history, its favourite haunt and so on, from Huysmans, Mrs. Hugh Frazer and others, with footnotes about Alister Crowley and Satanism. Our hostess was doing needlework in a chair by the fire. "Now that is most interesting," said she, all of a sudden. "We had a Satanist here to tea three weeks ago. She had been to Bradford in search of likely candidates, had found one, and was taking her to Bristol to be trained, I suppose." Sensation. G.K. and I were most eager to hear more, but the lady had told us all she knew.

XIII

We conversed on all these things more than once, they were staple topics, and therefore better remembered, but there was one evening of autumn in Ilkley when Gilbert and his wife were in rooms and we sat in the open window whilst Mrs. Chesterton sang *O Swallow! Swallow! flying, flying South*, from *The Princess*; while Gilbert with his crayons "did a blazon" for the Purity League. That is, he made a projection of arms, whether such be known to the Herald's College or not. The attic of St. John's was all storied by the coloured chalks of G.K.C., being beautifully accessible and cosy on wet mornings, but the later tenants preferred naked elegance and white-washed wall.

We had a real Penny Gaff in Heckmondwike, and I sent him the playbills thereof. *The Lady in Red, or the Power of a Mother's Love*, came back to me as the Lady in Bed, or the Power of Mrs. Eddy's Love. *The Shaughraun* was altered to the Shaw Grin. Both plays were done in a tent, next to John Murphy's CAVIOLIPHONE. Even Chesterton could never improve on that.

He ran a toy theatre and wrote plays and cut out figures for it, and this became so popular at one time, especially with children of any age, that Mrs. Chesterton bought ground across the road from Overroads, and built a brick-and-timber studio for the enlarged audiences. We acted charades there after the toy theatre had been given up. I never saw any of his puppet-plays, but I was Canon Crosskeys in a charade, which was so simple that when I said the word Belfry in my speech at the Parochial Meeting, the whole audience shouted the word after me. The rival company did one on Torture, which nobody guessed, especially as *Ure* was pronounced *Yaw* in the best Southern manner. (Do the English hear themselves any better than they see

themselves?) Miss Lily Yeats, sister of the poet, was of the company that time.

The evening waxed late, and I offered my arm to Gilbert going over to the house, but he refused it with a finality foreign to our friendship. So I went on ahead. As I entered the house ten yards in front, he fell over a tree-pot at the corner, and broke his arm at 11.45 p.m. Six weeks in bed was the result. It was then he composed several comic operas in the style (more or less) of his great namesake. One was on Christian Science:

'Tis a pale old world, a stale old world
And it must renew its youth:
So don't coddle up, but toddle up
And tumble to the truth.

Very early he made up a comic opera out of the P.N.E.U. of which Mrs. Chesterton was secretary. All the characters are real, and Mrs. Steinthal, at a crisis in the action (not the outcome of crowded intrigue or violence) distributes Floyd knives to all the children, enjoining them not to carve their aunts or their little sisters, but—if the parents fail to disappoint—imbrue the weapons in the parents' gore.

This is a random sample from yards of merry doggerel. The lines which he omits from his song on the Christian Social Union at Nottingham, I am able to replace, as I took them down from his own lips. He observed from the platform the stolid demeanour of the audience, and as he put it, they looked like banks of oysters. So he did what he called a subjective impression of the average Notts man.

The Christian Social Union here are very much annoyed:
It seems there are some duties which we never should avoid:
And so they sing a lot of hymns to help the unemployed.

.

Then Canon Holland fired ahead like fifty cannons firing, etc.
I understood him to remark (it seemed a little odd),
That half a dozen of his friends had never been in quod.
He said he was a Socialist himself, and so was God.

These are the lines suppressed in the *Autobiography*.

In due course a house was built on to the studio, and the stage of the studio is now the dining-room, curtained off from the body of the hall, which is lounge, drawing-room and reception-room and library all in one, the musicians' gallery being used to store translations of his works and books of no immediate use or interest, or review copies amongst which I browsed or batted (taking away what I thought worth while). Under the musicians' gallery is the old entrance to the studio, leading straight to the den, which has access to the garden or to the road, so that Gilbert could wander out in search of the *mot juste* without being detained and distracted in the lounge. At Battersea, Mrs. Chesterton had a tariff for proof-reading and general first-aid in composition. A halfpenny a comma, or such minor detail, a penny a correction, and twopence the *mot juste*. If it was a blazing brilliant *mot juste* she got sixpence, I think. As for rhymes in ballades, he had them all thought out first, as a

general rule. "Like a sonnet, only more so," he said.

On one side of the lounge is an open hearth, and facing it is a wide window beginning very low down, with a window-seat, the "summer hearth" in opposition to the winter hearth. A side-table for Gilbert's cigars, of which he was reasonably fond, as he did not smoke a pipe, and cigarettes were prone to set him on fire in one place or another. Matches were there too when he hadn't put them where they could never be found again. I got a paragraph in print once for noticing that he had put our only box behind a vase on the very high mantelshelf. It saved us from mobilising the kitchen round about ten at night. Such things on my part aroused his never very latent sense of wonder. I related, with a forlorn hope of his improvement, how I once set my room with fourteen ash-trays for eleven cigarette-smokers, and how every one of the eleven, at one stage or another, jeopardised the discussion by wandering all round the room looking for *the* ash-tray, and not finding, put the ashes into the gas-stove and threw butts and match-ends into the fender. But his sense of wonder was enough for him to the end. He tells in the *Autobiography* how his mental life began with that same sense, the miracle of seeing things for the first time, which makes all other miracles more than credible. So there entered Heaven, Chesterton the child, as was so truly said of him by the author of his premature epitaph.

XIV

I think it was in the late spring of 1912 that we both took part in the Ladies' Debating Society at Leeds. He led the discussion: that all wars were religious wars. This at the time was one of his commonplaces, but not so evident to me. I held that the worst wars were religious wars because of the *odium theologicum* being the most inveterate of animosities. I could not see the religious motive in some of them, though I had to admit that wars about trade or territory were religious too, waged by the worshippers of Mammon, who were quite fanatically religious, as far as that religion went. At the end of this discriminating support, I, with a kind of remorse, rallied to him with the age-long resistance of the Popes to the Grand Turk; how Pius II died at Ancona after reviewing the combined fleets of Christendom, which thereupon did nothing for a century. (The silver crown-piece minted in honour of the occasion, is one of the greatest rarities for coin-collectors, the Vatican had only one until 1922, when a better one, bought in London, was presented by a friend of mine).

I told of Lepanto, how Philip the Second of Spain had been assembling his Armada to invade England, and could only spare two ships to face the hundred galleys of the Porte; and how Don John of Austria, the only commander under whom Genoa would agree with Venice, burst the battle-line on a sinking ship, after fighting through all the hours of daylight. And the story of the Pope's prayer all that day, and his vision of the crisis of the action at three in the afternoon, with his vision of the victory about the time of the Angelus. Thus, I take it, came Chesterton to write the incomparable *Ballad of Lepanto*. It was the week of the anniversary, and it came out

on the date, October 7th. But he finished it with the postman pawing the ground downstairs saying he had but ten minutes to get it with his mail to the train. I had a piece of foolscap to wrap something in a month or two later, and it was blank except for a line at the top in the well-known hand:

The Pope is bent and praying like a man beneath the yoke.

This was discarded for:

The Pope was in his chapel before day or battle broke.
(*Don John of Austria is hidden in the smoke.*)

On the way home I got fierce about what trash it made of English history, and what rubbish we talked and sang of Nelson and Trafalgar. What was at stake at Trafalgar? Only the Industrial Revolution and the Financial Supremacy of the City of London, with child-labour and Gin-Palaces, only one small department of the gilded manure-heap called Modern Progress.

He interrupted me—we were alone in the train going back to Ilkley—by telling me he had made up his mind to be received into the Church and was only waiting for Frances to come with him, as she had led him into the Anglican Church out of Unitarianism. "Because I think I have known intimately by now all the best kinds of Anglicanism, and I find them only a pale imitation." I was thrilled, naturally, but not surprised. The surprise always had been at his natural affinity for all those things for which Catholics are persecuted or brow-beaten. I found during those years of intercourse preceding that night that, whatever he believed, he had rejected before I knew him all the slanders, and had unravelled for himself all the misrepresentations.

I hope this narrative has so far made it clear that I never attacked the Anglican position. I can do so and have done it often enough, but it is a sovran principle with me to strengthen what faith I find in a man, and not to weaken it. That is too greatly daring. And I recognise the truth of Mark Twain's aphorism, that true reverence never derides what other people revere. This is only to say that truth is but a nuisance without charity. We had often agreed about, and pointed out to each other, the phenomenon that some people can make any truth look like the most damnable or odious falsehood. For this reason, sensing Chesterton's unique gift, I had always tried to give him only my own best findings, and not the opinions of others, least of all, their statements of opinion. I may have held forth on Newman's ideas, but I have no recollection, except on the Development of Doctrine, which I discovered for myself and have dearly cherished since the summer of 1892. This I must have dragged in often in illustration or explanation, and a few flashes from St. Thomas Aquinas, though he was a long-dead friend of my youth. One thing I know I was strong about: the utter necessity of certitude. Because one cannot fight to the death for what is susceptible of doubt, and fighting to the death means resisting any temptation, for this is the daily death of self. Ethics? There are no ethics without dogmatics and there's an end. He was much tickled with this, as his early adventures among ethical societies had left him still chuckling. More detail on this is found in the *Autobiography*, but I can still hear his treble laughter as he told me his experiences.

XV

I feel bound to set down here one of the matters which arose between us out of my impish urge to tilt at his devotion to democracy. This was a kind of mystic passion, an insight in him which I well understood from his early poem:

Lo! I am come to Autumn
When all the leaves are gold:
Grey hair and golden leaves cry out
This year and I are old.

But now a great thing in the street
Seems any human nod,
Where shift in strange democracy
The million masks of God.

He goes on to hint that he had been saved from the cult of the Superman, about which Nietzsche had done a book or books, and which Shaw had done or was about to do into a play, preparing the way for those Dictators which have become a common aspiration, to say nothing of execration. I put it to him that Democracy lent itself and was lending itself to exasperation by agitators, and how this had got into the very blood of the peoples, and was like a fever, which made it next door to impossible that the patient should survive the number of rousing political wines which were the only treatment he was getting. To this he could only reply that the people would have to cultivate their sense of the ridiculous. But they do not understand satire, I said. And but for Belloc, the English people would not be getting any to understand. This led him up the garden walk into an admiring dissertation on the powers of Belloc. I pointed out how his power was spent in vain, just as Matthew Arnold's had been in *A Friendship's Garland*. So he wrote in the Press about the importance of satire, and the fewness of its adepts, and Belloc replied, and the two of them agreed that the spirit of the age was impervious to satire. Conclusion: one can only hope for a change in the Spirit of the Age. However it remains that Chesterton did as much to glorify the sense of the ridiculous as any writer of his time. To the decadents announcing that "Life is too important to be taken seriously", Chesterton made answer: "Man is so responsible that to bear life at all gracefully and well, a sense of humour is the next best thing to the grace of God. Solemnity is only one remove from hypocrisy". Among others he loved Susan Mitchell, as do I, and he had great comfort of her delicious Irish humour so pointed with wit. He had a theory not easy to understand as first presented, that God invented laughter to free the human soul, and in his young violent period he wrote a poem on the subject: how it is an arcane thing, and how Jesus Christ, spending the night in prayer to God, must have used laughter in His communing with His Father. This seemed to me rather callow, as it is possible to be above laughter as well as beside it, and I have not seen the poem reprinted anywhere. However, he fell back on the irony of God in the Old

Testament, and the flashing irony of our Lord in some of His exchanges with the Scribes. In Chesterton's essay on Carlyle he points out how Carlyle brought back from the Old Testament the idea of Divine irony in all history. Which is a bigger thing to say of Carlyle than any of his other admirers, so far as I am aware, have been able to attribute.

I do not refer to his Carlyle of the Twelve Types, but to a later essay for the *Bookman*, copiously illustrated.

It must have been in the days of the Scotch terrier called Winkle (in verse, Quoodle), before the building of Top Meadow, that Mrs. Chesterton and I on a bright morning, coming back from a small shopping-trip to the village, suddenly saw Gilbert at his largest, on all fours on top of the pergola, peering down through the creepers. Whereas we had left him "sending articles to hell", as he called his life-long pursuits. With outcry I rushed to the rescue, but Mrs. Chesterton was quite cool, calling me back with: "Don't worry, I had the pergola very strongly built in anticipation of Gilbert's antics."

Another time, being run down for the afternoon from London, and sincerely pressed to stay, I was accommodated with Gilbert's pyjamas. They went twice round me, exactly. Ought one to suppress a detail of this sort? Not according to modern custom. Be the stream of consciousness never so turbid, no one has any use for a strainer. Chesterton once lectured in the Aula Maxima at Leeds University on: What is the matter with the Drama? Only that it is not dramatic. It is evolutionary. The characters are all possessed of private means, and not having to work for a living, they stay on the stage all the time, boring one another to tears, and there is a triangle, isosceles or equilateral, and sometimes one triangle inside another, and they keep on jarring until they get divorced and live happy ever after. This, besides being the very opposite to the old drama which had a something to make for, aids in the annihilation of interest and even of thought, and fails of all object whatsoever, and is thoroughly inhuman. Whereas drama was invented to show how every man comes to a crisis in which he makes a free choice for good or ill, and the audience, allowed to suspect the tendencies, are held to watch how they work themselves out, teleology being the second deepest of all human instincts, causality being the deepest.

We had in our talks, often recurred to the fact that the great Drama of the Heathen was a demonstration of Blind Unpitiful Fate, whereas Christianity had based its drama on the great and difficult fact of Responsibility, arising from the Freedom of the Will. But modern Drama portrayed people as doing what they liked, and as nothing is so abysmally boring, it was decaying whilst it grew. Dried blossoms, empty fruits. If one thing is as good as another, where is the use of selection?

XVI

In the last month of 1914 Chesterton collapsed utterly. He had been writing

pamphlets at Government suggestion and at high pressure, as for instance *The Crimes of England*, which were translated into several European languages, and was exhausted beyond recovery. He got what can only be described as gout all over. Brain, stomach, lungs were affected, and he was ten weeks unconscious, and had to be kept so, since the doctor said that a shock of recognition might destroy the brain. After a miracle of patient and watchful treatment, he recovered and I went to see him at Easter, when I noted that his clothes fitted him where they touched, but he looked fifteen years younger. In January, 1915, Mrs. Wilfrid Ward telegraphed to me that he was *in extremis*, and would I go to him. I went and met her at the Ladies' Club in London, and thence went that afternoon to Beaconsfield, prepared to give him the last rites, on the strength of what he had said to me nearly three years before. But his wife explained to me that part of the treatment, which was so strict that she alone could enter the sick-room. A total stranger might make no difference, but his mother was only allowed to peep at him from over the bed-rail when it was certain that he slept. Then I told her why I had wished to see him, the talk in the train in 1912. She gave a long half-amused cry: "So that is what Gilbert meant by all the dark hints about being buried in Kensal Green, and so on. I never could make head or tail. I suppose he wanted to put it to me straightforwardly, but couldn't bring himself to the crisis. It's just like him." Of course he was dying to influence her to his way of thinking, and that was all the form it took. As he could not go anywhere without her, he still more shrank from leaving for good the spiritual home of the Church of England, where she had made him so comfortable. So I left as I had come. After Easter, when I saw him again, nothing was said by either of them, and I left it at that.

But his secretary, Miss Nellie Allport, sat with us and entertained us with her adventures in novel-writing for the *Family Herald*. How once in a way she wrote of low life and the villain got drowned in the duck-pond, but the editor told her it would not do at all. So it had to be persons of title as before, with the villain drowning himself in the ornamental water of the Ducal Seat, the splash being unheard because the string band was playing for dinner. Chesterton was moralising and chuckling in his old form, and we wandered on to haunted houses, when Miss Allport told us her own experience. She had been trained by her father in dialectical materialism and was a disciple of Herbert Spencer if anything. A respectable and reverent Agnostic, but impervious to the unseen. But not entirely, after her adventure. She had got a really handy and suitable flat near the British Museum, so cheap that there must have been a catch in it. When she moved in, on the first day she thought she was followed from the door, and when she sat down to write or read, she could not get away from the feeling that someone was looking over her shoulder. But like a good Spencerian, she made light of this more or less subjective hallucination. However, that night, just as she was sinking into slumber, a frightful bang resounded on the outer door of the flat. Shaken with indignation she got up and opened the door, looking high and low and even going some way up and down the stairway to discover the author of the outrage. Nobody was about and all was still and lonesome. As she was sinking to sleep again the same thing happened without any agency being discoverable. Again a third time. Sleep being then out of the question she made tea and sat up all night. In the morning, at Beaconsfield, Chesterton noticed her haggard appearance, and she told him all about it. "You must have a Crucifix on that door," he said. That afternoon he went to London with her and at Burns and Oates's in

Baker Street, bought her a one-and-sixpenny crucifix, instructing her to nail it on the inside of the door. She was no more molested in any way, she said, and was still residing in the flat at the time of speaking.

Here is a sequence of extracts from letters which Mrs. Chesterton wrote, all during his illness:

Oct. 16th, 1914. "Appallingly busy, no time for anything. Doing a lot of Government stuff which is most wearing and difficult. The *New Witness* must keep its end up whilst Cecil is in the trenches."

Nov. 25th. "You must pray for him. He is seriously ill and I have two nurses. It is mostly heart-trouble, but there are complications. He is quite his normal self, as to head and brain, and he even dictates and reads a great deal."

Dec. 29th, 1914. "Gilbert had a bad relapse on Christmas Eve, and now is being desperately ill. He is not often conscious, and is so weak—I feel he might ask for you—if so I shall wire. Dr. is still hopeful, but I feel in despair."

Jan. 3rd, 1915. "If you came he would not know you, and this condition may last some time. The brain is dormant, and must be kept so. If he is sufficiently conscious at moment to understand, I will ask him to let you come—or will send on my own responsibility. Pray for his soul and mine."

Jan. 7th, 1915. "Gilbert seemed decidedly clearer yesterday, and though not quite so well to-day the doctor says he has reason to hope the mental trouble is working off. His heart is stronger, and he is able to take plenty of nourishment. Under the circumstances therefore I am hoping and praying he may soon be sufficiently himself to tell us what he wants done. I am dreadfully unhappy at not knowing how he would wish me to act. His parents would never forgive me if I acted only on my own authority. I do pray to God He will restore him to himself that we may know. I feel in His mercy He will, even if death is the end of it—or the beginning shall I say?"

Jan. 9th (postcard). "There has been quite distinct improvement and awaking the last three days—we hope the recovery may move much more rapidly now, but we may do nothing to hasten the brain or make any suggestions. He is sleeping a great deal."

Jan. 12th, 1915. "He is really better I believe and by the mercy of God I dare hope he is to be restored to us. Physically he is stronger, and the brain is beginning to work normally, and soon I trust we shall be able to ask him his wishes with regard to the Church. I am so thankful to think that we can get at his desire."

Jan. 18th, 1915. "Gilbert has improved yesterday and again to-day, after having been at a standstill for a week. He *asked* for me to-day, which is a great advance. He is dreadfully weak, but the brain-clouds are clearing, though the doctors won't allow him to make the slightest effort to think. Please God he will recover normally—and I can only abide in His patience. I will let you know of his welfare as often as I can."

Jan. 29th, 1915. "Gilbert moves very slowly, but so far forward, though progress is almost inappreciable, as seen day by day. We can only pray that nothing may hinder the return to complete consciousness, and the doctor says all will come right, but it will need infinite patience—I will let you know if there is any change."

March 15th, 1915. "Things are going on satisfactorily with Gilbert though very very slowly. He has to be kept very quiet, as he is easily upset, and that affects his heart. He is gradually clearing and is realising his surroundings. He said to me yesterday, "Did you think I was going to die?" I said, "I feared it at one time, but now you are to live." He said, "Does Father O'Connor know?" and I said, "Yes." He then wandered off again into something else. I thought you would like to know he had been and was evidently thinking of you.

"The doctor has no doubt that before very long he will be quite normal, though it is impossible to foretell how long it will take. So, dear Padre, he needs your prayers still. So do I."

Easter Eve, 1915. "All goes well here, though still very very slowly—G's mind is gradually clearing, but it is still difficult to him to distinguish between the real and the unreal. I am quite sure he will soon be able to think and act for himself, but I dare not hurry matters at all. I have told him I am writing to you often and he said, 'That is right—I'll see him soon. I want to talk to him.' He wanders at times, but the clear intervals are longer. He repeated the Creed last night, this time in English.

"I feel I understand something of the significance the resurrection of the body when I see him just consciously laying hold of life again."

Many prayers were said for him up and down the country by Catholics, who in some mysterious way recognised his claim on them. At Hawkesyard, in 1916, Father Vincent McNabb pointed out to me an old lay-brother, gnarled and bronzed, the very breed for Ghirlandajo. "I don't know where he got it, he doesn't read Chesterton; but he never missed saying the whole Rosary for him every day of this illness."

We agreed so perfectly in our admiration of Mark Twain as a humourist and as a writer, that all one needs to say here is that I could add nothing to Gilbert's store except a reference to Buck Fanshaw's funeral, and a few aphorisms from Puddn-head Wilson's Moral Calendar. As for instance: Let us be careful to gather from our experiences only such wisdom as they happen to contain. For instance, a cat that has once sat down on a hot stove-lid will never do so any more, but neither will she sit down upon a cold one.

In a first edition of *Orthodoxy*, John Lane, MCMIX, I find on the fly-leaf after an inscription by the author, the following quotation: "When throwing a waste-paper basket over the head of a virtuous and clear-minded pontiff, it is unnecessary to inscribe many explanatory words upon porcelain.

**Later works of Kai Lung
Unpublished."**

This testifies to the influence of that immortal work *The Wallet of Kai Lung* upon Chesterton and his less-known contemporaries. It was about 1900 that Robert Hudson introduced the book to all those friends who were within call, for he was a fellow-villager with the author, Ernest Bramah, whose real name was Smith. Lord Rosebery, Augustine Birrell, Charles Gatty, George Wyndham, and many more, had many pleasant thrills from the *Wallet*. It was such a school of style without tears,

that folk would amuse themselves with imitating the diction. Ordinary proverbs and commonplace episodes were couched in the Chinese literary manner so very painfully that one could spend wet afternoons undeciphering them. "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip" would be rendered; "Beware lest when about to embrace the sublime Emperor, you tread upon the elusive banana-peel." And *chercher midi à quatorze heures* is translated: "It is a mark of insincerity of purpose to look for the sublime Emperor among the low-class tea-shops." But not even Chesterton could recapture the fresh inventions of that unique work. Even the author himself, when at last induced to repeat the experiment, failed to carry it out, except in places, with that glee of primal inspiration for which it stands alone. Like Mozart, it has a great future before it yet.

XVII

We once compared notes on the scarcity of courage amongst hangmen, and from this we got on to the mystical military fact, ignored only by incompetent generals, that once a soldier loots or murders, his military value peters out. Nor must he be muddled with police or given their work to do, as occurred during the deathly incompetence of the eighties in Ireland when General Buller openly refused to let his men guard the violence of evictions. The sword has a sacredness which deserts it as soon as it is turned against the inoffensive. Military men know this by instinct, unless they are in the army for social standing only, i.e. for purely decorative purposes. It pleased Gilbert immensely and seemed to tune him up when he got occasion to air his admiration of the true soldier, to point out that all the soldier's glory lay not in his weapons, but in the enemy's; that he was not mighty to kill, but ready to give his life. He was never what is called a Pacifist, though always a man of peace, and he especially delighted in the Church's settlement of the vexed question: that a man may justly be exempted from military service if he have first and foremost given up those things for which men are wont to fight: Wealth, Wife, Will. In other words, those who take the three Vows of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience have the right to be always non-combatant. They did not all use this right in France, even Bishops came across the world to join up in 1914. This is decidedly a stretch and even Quixotic, but then Conscription is a return of Pagan Cæsarism and has by no means called forth that resistance which the Church of the Fathers successfully made to the Lord of the World. In all such considerations I was first to remark on those freaks of Christian Polity; he hung back as not presuming to lay hands on the Ark.

For the same reason, it would appear, he never undertook the book on Savonarola which I often encouraged him to begin. I think he read up a little for it somewhere in the past ten years, but he found it too involved in both events and principles to afford him that clear inspiration in which his soul could free itself. As in the Savonarola Essay in *Twelve Types*. He had nothing to go upon then except George Eliot's report of a report about the burning of the vanities. No works of art were

sacrificed, only wigs and masks and loan robes, and Sandro Botticelli was there to replace any paintings, but no paintings were given up. Savonarola was a Catholic Reformer, not a Puritan enemy of stained glass. Chesterton most wonderfully concentrates on his real motive for stirring up Florence: Civilisation had got to the point of self-adoration, and the Medici, artistic pawn-brokers, professional usurers, were its riders as well as its type, beggars on horseback, riding to hell. In such a world, new things would soon grow old, and old things could never be renewed, and this Savonarola saw with the penetration of genius, as Chesterton is quick to point out. But the political aims of Pope Alexander the Sixth, which envenomed his hostility to the Friar, and put him on the wrong side for all time; the details of the excommunication which made it uncanonical and invalid apart from its purely secular motives, these were unknown to Gilbert at the outset, and later on deterred him from specialising in Church history. So one of the few satisfactory books for the many on the great and deeply-injured Prior of San Marco, has failed to come our way. I told him how Villari had solved the problem of Fra Girolamo's alleged contumacy as no one else had dreamt. But Gilbert was busy with *The Everlasting Man* just then, and could not see his way clear.

XVIII

I begged him to write in my copy of *The Ballad of the White Horse*, and thought he was taking a long time. It seems now time well spent.

To Father O'Connor—G. K. Chesterton

The scratching pen, the aching tooth,
The Plea for Higher Unity,
The aged buck, the earnest youth,
The Missing Link, the Busy Bee,
The Superman, the Third Degree
Are things that I should greatly like
To take and sling quite suddenly
As far as Heaven from Heckmondwike.

As far as Hood is from Fitzooth,
As far as seraphs from a flea,
As far as Campbell from the truth,
Or old Bohemia from the sea,
Or Shakespeare from Sir Herbert Tree
Or Nathan from an Arab sheik,
Or most of us from £ s. d.
As far as Heaven from Heckmondwike.

As far as actresses from youth,

As far, as far as lunch from tea,
As far as Horton from Maynooth,
As far as Paris from Paree;
As far as Hawke is from a gee,
Or I am from an old high bike,
As far as Stead from sanity,
As far as Heaven from Heckmondwike.

Envoi

Prince, Cardinal that is to be,
Cardinals do not go on strike
I'm far from wishing it (D.V.)
As far as Heaven from Heckmondwike.

In Kensington High Street I stood myself a copy of *The Ball and the Cross*, just out, and took it on with me to Beaconsfield to be inscribed. He was ten minutes late for lunch, but he brought down the book inscribed as follows (it had a bright orange dust-jacket):

This is a book I do not like,
Take it away to Heckmondwike,
A lurid exile, lost and sad
To punish it for being bad.
You need not take it from the shelf
(I tried to read it once myself:
The speeches jerk, the chapters sprawl,
The story makes no sense at all)
Hide it your Yorkshire moors among
Where no man speaks the English tongue.

Hail Heckmondwike! Successful spot!
Saved from the Latin's festering lot,
Where Horton and where Hocking see
The grace of Heaven, Prosperity.
Above the chimneys, hung and bowed
A pillar of most solid cloud;
To starved oppressed Italian eyes,
The place would seem a Paradise,
And many a man from Como Lake,
And many a Tyrolese would take
(If priests allowed them what they like)
Their holidays in Heckmondwike.

The Belgian with his bankrupt woes,
Who through deserted Brussels goes,
The hind that threads those ruins bare
Where Munich and where Milan were—
Hears owls and wolves howl like Gehenna
In the best quarters of Vienna,

Murmurs in tears, "Ah, how unlike
The happiness of Heckmondwike!"

In Spain the sad guitar they strike,
And, yearning, sing of Heckmondwike;
The Papal Guard leans on his pike
And dreams he is in Heckmondwike.
Peru's proud horsemen long to bike
But for one hour in Heckmondwike;
Offered a Land Bill, Pat and Mike
Cry: "Give us stones!—in Heckmondwike!"
Bavarian Bier is good, belike:
But try the gin of Heckmondwike.
The Flamands drown in ditch and dyke
Their itch to be in Heckmondwike:
Rise, Freedom, with the sword to strike!
And turn the world to Heckmondwike.

Take then this book I do not like—
It may improve in Heckmondwike.

G. K. CHESTERTON.

He had just been reading a shilling pamphlet by Dr. Horton on the Roman Menace or some such fearful wild fowl. I know he had read it, because no one else could when he had done. Most of his books, as and when read, had gone through every indignity a book may suffer and live. He turned it inside out, dog-eared it, pencilled it, sat on it, took it to bed and rolled on it, and got up again and spilled tea on it—if he were sufficiently interested. So Dr. Horton's pamphlet had a refuted look when I saw it.

XIX

There is one more dedication-poem inscribed in *The Secret of Father Brown*, 1927. But first let us register remorse. I stayed up too long with him, despite some plain tips from Mrs. Chesterton. His best time of all for his own best work or *prep* as he might call it, was from ten until midnight. Some half of this I wasted. He loved to sip a glass of wine and to stroll between sips in and out of his study, brooding and jotting, and then the dictation was ready for the morning. Perhaps I wasted a whole afternoon once under his cherry tree, chewing windfalls and pumping Christmas carol tunes into him, when the craze was acute. That he never minded, but it was mortgaging his creative work to rob him of his bedtime ruminations. The fact that he could, in his last decade, enjoy music, may have killed my perception, but I used to croon Kipling's "Follow me 'Ome", and "Kabul River", which latter I knew he ranked as one of Kipling's finest verses. We agreed that

Kipling's violence was a killer of true poesy, and that his work suffered from a lack of spirituality, but we ranked him very high since we both disclaimed being high-brow. His "Crack of Day" was hideously mistaken as a noise and as a metaphor. "And those eyes, the break of day, Lights that do mislead the morn," we quoted in final condemnation. Besides, it had led muscular penmen of sports' reports to talk perpetually about "smashing" a record. This is a thing that cannot be done even in metaphor. Only a gramophone record can be smashed. An athletic record can be altered by an inch or a second, but this is not to *smash*. For all this perversion of English we put the blame on Kipling, mostly towards dead of night.

But more than once I had to repeat for him the most entirely precious of all folk-songs I ever heard, *The Six Dukes*. It is entirely sophisticated in that the local bard was straining his resources, and is truly rural, as will appear from the text in which I endeavour to indicate the original Doric.

Six Dukes they went fishing
Down by the seä-side.
They spy'd a dead boddee
Wash'd up with the tide.

One of them says to each other:
(These wurds I heer'd um say)
'Tis the royal Duke of Grantham
Wich the tide has 'ee wash'd away.

They took 'im up tew Portsmouth
Tew the place where 'ee wuz known:
They took him up to London
Tew the place where 'ee wuz born.

They took out hees bowills
And stretchid out hees feet,
And they balmid hees boddee
With rosiz so sweet.

Now lies he between the two towers,
Now lies he in the cold clay:
And the royal Queen of Grantham
Went weeping away.

In *The Secret of Father Brown* he wrote on the fly-leaf, "To Father O'Connor with love", and on the end-paper:

Folk-Song

Six detectives went fishing
Down by the sea-side—
They found a Dead Body
And enquired how it died.

Father Brown he informed them

Quite mild, without scorn:
"Like you and me and the rest of us,
He died of being born."

The Detective from the *Daily News*
Asked: "Where are the Dead?"
And Father Brown coughed gently,
And he answered and said:

"If you come to St. Cuthbert's
I'll tell you to-day."
But the other Five Detectives
Went weeping away.

(It was just the end of the Silly Season.)

Turning over a leaf or two, one comes on the Secret of Father Brown. As manifested by the original Brown, it took the form of a contention that some people cultivate the habit of being shocked, and get so vain about it that they expect their clergy to be even more shockable than themselves. This is either the grossest of stupidities, or dimmest spiritual pride. To pretend that you are incapable of even imagining things that happen every day, means making or manufacturing scandal, advertising evil, which is miles worse than merely talking or giving scandal. No professional man has any business to be shocked at the possibilities for evil in human nature,—on the contrary, it is his business to know them all. But he is not expected to know them by experience. I was once nervous about confessing my sins in a foreign language, and asked a companion what the Confessor was like. "Oh, when you say 'I have done sixteen murders since my last confession', he will say, 'and is that all?'" This to Gilbert was pure jam, especially as I explained to him that it is the great saints who are related to have sustained the worst temptations. So they are not shocked in the newspaper manner to hear of anyone yielding to the same. It seems to be a law of human nature that those who have never been within sight of the extreme are prone to hold extreme views, especially in morals. But we never had time enough together to work this out, much as he would have loved to do it, and much as I should admire his doing. However, all through his writings are glints of the great sea's inestimable light.

XX

One story gave much merriment to his declining years. He had it from Father Ronald Knox, who had been lunching at Brighton with Monsignor Wallis, who from lunch was called out to hear a French confession. (He is bi-lingual or nearly.) At his return to table one of the curates took care that he should hear him discoursing on the comparative facility *he* had with confessions in French. "You've

only got to say: Oh! vous avez, avez-vous!"

His big knife was given to me by Mrs. Chesterton as the most entirely Gilbertian thing. He had had it for twenty-four years and had taken it abroad and even to bed. She often retrieved it from under his pillow in foreign hotels, for fear of complications. It is seven and a half inches long when shut and fourteen inches open, a Mexican or Texan general utility implement. He cut new books with it, but once, during a public debate in Dublin, he absent-mindedly drew it to sharpen a pencil, and the opposition speech was drowned in delighted laughter by the audience. More than once it gave him occasion to tell one of Belloc's fancy tales, somewhat in the following manner: The dying brigand chief said to the priest who assisted him: "Father, I have no means of recompensing the invaluable service you have rendered me, nothing but my old knife and a principle which has served me well in all my difficulties,—thumb on the blade, and strike upwards."

Besides a wishfulness to write on Savonarola, he desired to do an extensive essay on the history of the Jesuit mission in Paraguay, perhaps the most blasting of all indictments against the merchant in politics. But to use Mrs. Chesterton's words, he had everyone pulling him everywhere about something, and my remorse for wasting a little of his precious time becomes complacency when I think of the other wild asses who trampled so much possible value into nothingness. Henry James has a beautiful and cultured view of this perpetual tragedy in *The Death of the Lion*. It is all untinged with the savage indignation which tore the heart of Swift, but it leaves an indelible impression that lions are rare and jackasses so plentiful that they enhance the lack of lions. Only those who lived with Chesterton from day to day can give us any notion of what we have lost to those portentous hooves. I have sorrow of one most raging jackass who insisted on being noticed by him, and he was a clergyman and used me in my innocence, and he was only one out of hundreds, I feel certain.

XXI

The Great War was over and Cecil was dead in it, and Gilbert was invited to America, and very busy with the long and careful adjustments of his work which any such engagement made necessary in advance, when Mrs. Chesterton gave up some grave symptoms to the X-ray, symptoms making it seem out of the question to travel at all. And it was only two months to the start for U.S.A. At once I procured public prayers in a Crippled Children's Home in Vienna, to which both husband and wife had been very friendly in the starvation days of Austria after Versailles. In a fortnight's time the grave alarm was off and the first American tour went forward to a happy issue.

A second visit to America was made some years later. Mrs. Chesterton was more informing on the whole than Gilbert. He recorded his surprise at the big hotels: their

lounges were a bit like Trafalgar Square with less privacy—rather like the Grands Magasins du Louvre. He also remarked a nervous apprehension, subconscious for the most part, but far from comfortable, induced by the stampededability of the American public. Their journalism gives them the jumps, and at a crisis will stampede them. "I don't suppose you mean the South," said I, "for they have always been charming, in my opinion." "No: East and Middle West, who keep persuading themselves that they are the United States." I asked Mrs. Chesterton for her impressions. "Is it not a legacy from Pilgrim Fathers and that, that the women are such self-appointed arbiters of behaviour, and is it not a peril or a corrosive that this should be so? For the men have plainly given up their birthright." "That has been the case so long now, that nobody minds it or feels it: the formidable thing is the women's wonderful power of organising themselves. They took over one of the biggest New York hotels and ran it for a week, devoting all the profits to charity. And the profits were larger than usual."

XXII

Extract from a letter of July 3rd, 1909:

"I would not write this to anyone else, but you combine so unusually in your own single personality the characters of (1) priest, (2) human being, (3) man of the world, (4) man of the other world, (5) man of science, (6) old friend, (7) new friend, not to mention Irishman and picture dealer, that I don't mind suggesting the truth to you. Frances has just come out of what looked bad enough to be an illness, and is just going to plunge into one of her recurrent problems of pain and depressions. The two may be just a bit too much for her and I want to be with her every night for a few days—there's an Irish Bull for you!

"One of the mysteries of Marriage (which must be a Sacrament and an extraordinary one too) is that a man evidently useless like me can yet become at certain instants indispensable. And the further oddity (which I invite you to explain on mystical grounds) is that he never feels so small as when he knows that he is necessary.

Yours ever,
G. K. CHESTERTON."

This was à propos a joint visit to Heckmondwike from Ilkley, but Mrs. Chesterton was too ill to come and this delayed Gilbert's visit too. Holograph letters from Gilbert were very rare: the next is dated:

Xmas Eve,

1920.

DEAR FATHER O'CONNOR,

I feel I must scribble you a line, with incongruous haste and crudity, to send you our love at Xmas and to ask for your prayers. Frances and I are going away to America for a month or two; and I am glad of it, for I shall be at least free from the load of periodical work that has prevented me from talking properly to anybody, even to her; and I want to talk very much. When it is over I shall probably want to talk to you, about very important things—the most important things there are. Frances has not been well, and though I think she is better, I have to do things in a considerate way, if you understand me; I feel it is also only right to consult with my Anglo-Catholic friends; but I have at present a feeling that it will be something like a farewell. Things have shaken me up a good deal lately—especially the persecution of Ireland. But of course there are even bigger things than that.

Forgive this confused scrawl.

Yours always,

G. K. Chesterton.

He was longing to have it out with Frances about his conversion, but his work and her delicate health were his excuses for not satisfying that longing. But it was also, as she had already guessed, his congenital aversion from starting a crisis. The first visit to America, taking place early in 1921, did much to mitigate his aversion, but did not take him quite over it.

Here is the deciding letter, undated, but post-mark July 11, 1922:

TOP MEADOW,

BEACONSFIELD.

DEAR FATHER O'CONNOR,

I ought to have written to you long before in reply to your kind letter; but indeed I do not answer it now in order to agree with you about Ireland or disagree with you about France; if indeed we do disagree about anything. I write with a more personal motive; do you happen to have a holiday about the end of next week or thereabouts; and would it be possible for you to come south and see our new house—or old studio? This sounds a very abrupt invitation; but I write in great haste, and am troubled about many things. I want to talk to you about them; especially the most serious ones, religious and concerned with my own rather difficult position. Most of the difficulty has been my own fault, but not all; some of my difficulties would commonly be called duties; though I ought perhaps to have learned sooner to regard them as lesser duties. I mean that a Pagan or Protestant or Agnostic might even have excused me; but I have grown less and less of a Pagan or Protestant, and can no longer excuse myself. There are lots of things for which I never did excuse myself; but I am thinking now of particular points that might really be casuistical. Anyhow, you are the person that Frances and I think of with most affection, of all who could help in such a matter. Could you let me know if any time such as I name, or after, could give us the joy of seeing you?

Yours always sincerely,

G. K. CHESTERTON.

To this I replied at once that I would hold myself at his disposal any day during the

ensuing fortnight. I wrote the same day to Belloc, with an untoward sequel for me, as shall presently appear.

Frances Chesterton writes on July 23rd:

"I just want to know if you can send *me* a line as to how long you can stay in Beaconsfield. I have a spare bed for Wednesday night, but after that I must get a room out or at one of the inns for you. Please don't think me inhospitable. I am only too pleased that G. wants you—and I am sure that you will now be able to give him all the advice and help he wants. But I must make arrangements, and I want you to have all the time you may need together."

Wednesday, July 26th, 1922, was the day agreed upon for me to make for Top Meadow. But on Monday morning, July 24th, a wire came, reply paid: "Appoint meet me to-day London. Belloc." I replied: "Westminster Cathedral 3.30." With some hustle I caught the 10.20; St. Paneras 2.20 or so. Westminster Cathedral before 3.30, waiting until long after 4.30. No sign of Belloc, but he had been seen in London that forenoon. Six weeks later, on meeting Belloc I asked him the reason of his telegram. "I wanted to keep you from going to Gilbert. I thought he would never be a Catholic." Only Belloc I fancy can tell us if he had made any vain efforts, as passages in Chesterton's book on Conversion seem to indicate. It was easy to fluster Gilbert but impossible to hustle him.

Alone in London from Monday to Wednesday! but I saw the outside of St. Alban's while waiting for the bus.

On Thursday morning, on one of our trips to the village, I told Mrs. Chesterton: there is only one thing troubling Gilbert about the great step,—the effect it is going to have on you. "Oh! I shall be infinitely relieved. You cannot imagine how it fidgets Gilbert to have anything on his mind. The last three months have been exceptionally trying. I should be only too glad to come with him, if God in His mercy would show the way clear, but up to now He has not made it clear enough to me to justify such a step." So I was able to reassure Gilbert that afternoon. We discussed at large such special points as he wished, and then I told him to read through the Penny Catechism to make sure there were no snags to a prosperous passage. It was a sight for men and angels all the Friday to see him wandering in and out of the house with his fingers in the leaves of the little book, resting it on his forearm whilst he pondered with his head on one side. He knew well the story of his friend Phillimore who called on the Archbishop of Glasgow to ask to be received to Holy Church. The butler brought down a Penny Catechism with: His Grace says will you call again when you know all this by heart? Tell His Grace, says Phillimore, that I've come to be examined in it now.

Prince, Bayard would have smashed his sword
To see the sort of knights you dub.
Is that the last of them? Oh Lord!
Will someone take me to a pub.

The Headmaster of Douai Abbey School, one of Chesterton's oldest and keenest admirers, holding a unique collection of Chestertoniana, had suggested the Abbey's sacred shade to be the scene of Gilbert's reception to the Church. But the Railway

Hotel had its dance-room fitted up with Sir Philip Rose's Chapel fixtures, fairly handsome they were; and Mrs. Borlase was a buxom landlady from the west of Ireland and could be trusted to play up. So after lunch at Top Meadow on Sunday, July 30th, 1922, Gilbert and I set out for the Railway Hotel, Gilbert selecting from the stand with special solicitude, a rare and beautiful snakewood stick which the Knights of Columbus had just given him in America. The Creed of Pius the Fourth was repeated very fervently—I recalled inwardly that at one time or another in our numerous encounters, he had stoutly proclaimed his adherence to almost every clause. Dom Ignatius Rice, O.S.B., came over from Douai, and dear Frances—my eyes fill to think of it, was present, in tears which I am sure were not all grieving.

We went out into the sunshine, and off to tea with Lady Ruggles-Brise, who had refused to be put off that morning. Prison Reform was naturally a prominent topic, especially as General Chesterton had been a Light of the North in this regard long before. Lady R.-B. had been a Stonor *en premières nocés*, and as Archbishop Stonor had ordained me priest, we had a few harmonious chords to strike. It was a good set-off to the tension of the early afternoon, better than going back to Top Meadow, where Frances was giving tea to Father Rice.

During the twenty minutes' walk from the Railway Hotel to the "Village", I recalled to him some of my remarks of the preceding days: that there was never an Anglican but minimised some point, great or small, of dogma, that is of accepted fact in religion, and that now he would be inebriated with the plenteousness of the Lord's House, and do better work than ever, even as Newman of the Parochial and Plain was but the try-out for Newman of Gerontius and the Second Spring.

Full soon he answered with *The Everlasting Man* and at once with *St. Francis*, which a Franciscan professor once said in my hearing to be worth all the other books on St. Francis. He was unwontedly silent that afternoon, or so it seemed to me. I do hope *I* did not talk too much, though it would not have been the first time if I had.

XXIII

It would be tedious to detail the letters of congratulation from those who had long loved and prayed for Gilbert. Cardinal Bourne, Cardinal Merry del Val, Father Vincent McNabb, all voiced tranquil joy. It was not like the conversion of Saul—Gilbert had always been a skilled and keen defender of all Catholic ideals, as is manifest in his book called *Orthodoxy*, and in many more besides. He came into great demand on public occasions, and naturally was pulled to pieces by the "Oh let's" Brigade. I was much solicited by the obscure well-meaning to get him to do this, that and the other; and though I held out manfully I fear I let him be preyed upon to no one's advantage but that of the would-be important. There is a growing plaint in Mrs. Chesterton's letters of the way he is beset and worried and kept off his work and pulled to pieces and done to death by folk whose whole imagination is

bounded by themselves and their interests. The Savonarola book could not be got at, not within miles and miles, and the immortal verse we have lost through the sheer wear and tear of worrying the lion to death can never be estimated.

One of my own mistakes did, I hope, provoke something better than itself. Remorse overtook me too late one night at Top Meadow. I had kept him up too long with enlarging on the place of St. Michael the Archangel in the scheme of things. The natural gap between Creator and Creature had been doubled by the creature's rebellion. Michael was the first creature to resist temptation, to resist it utterly and once for all. So he watches over all undoings of the disaster, especially the Passion. That is why I feel sure that he is the "angel who with awe amid the garden shade the great Creator in His sickness saw sooth'd by a creature's aid." And it was he who rolled away the stone, since the Resurrection is the Challenge-Miracle, and he whose name is itself the challenge against all insane disloyalties of the creation, did most appropriately indicate the emptiness of the tomb as type of the fatuity of going against God. And so on, to his rare interferences in history, traceable by the utter silence and coma of the erstwhile menace. In 1929, I think, Gilbert printed:

Ode to Saint Michael in Time of Peace

When the world cracked because of a sneer in Heaven,
Leaving out for all time a scar upon the sky,
Thou didst rise up against the horror in the highest,
Dragging down the highest who look'd down on the Most High!
Rending from the seventh heaven the hall of exaltation
Down the seven heavens till the dark seas burn.
Thou that in thunder threwest down the Dragon
Knowest in what silence the Serpent can return.

When from the deeps a dying God astounded
Angels and devils who do all but die,
Seeing Him fallen where thou could'st not follow,
Seeing Him mounted where thou could'st not fly,—
Hand on the hilt, thou hast halted all thy legions
Waiting the [Greek: tetelestai] and the acclaim:
Swords that salute Him Dead and Everlasting,
God beyond God, and greater than His Name!

It is first printed in the *British Legion Book* for 1929, and has been reprinted in *G.K.'s Weekly*, September 27th, 1936. It seems to me one of the high-water marks of religious contemplation. For Chesterton was contemplative and intuitive, and when he seems to be maundering, he is *quartering* the idea like a hawk, and will suddenly swoop to a conclusion with startling effect. Anything might set him off. When I remarked that the ancient tragedies left one braced if saddened, but the modern tragedies were an infliction because you knew there would be no fun at the funeral, it might result in a book, if he were at a loose end, which he hardly ever was, but it would certainly breed an essay or a lecture. In like manner we would discuss modern art, and allowing for the need perpetual to refresh the convention, all art being convention, we would class painting into the paint which tries to get at us through mere reason, and that which appeals to intuition by flattering the eye, making it see

more and better. Music, too, from being sensual overmuch had got to enlisting farm-yard noises and animal passion, as distinct from the intellectual pleasure of studied composition. Where this is totally absent, music is in grievous danger of being half-witted. "God is my witness", writes Beethoven in one of his letters, "that I have never set down a note except for His glory". Though Gilbert was for much of his life tone-deaf, he could jump to a conclusion from this, that the repulsion in many modern art-efforts came from denial or ignoring of God,—they smelt of despair. Even in his earliest verse, he has traces of this intuition:

"Where men are weary of green wine
And sick of crimson seas,"—(White Horse.)

And again:

"They trim sad lamps, they touch sad strings,
Hearing the heavy purple wings
Where the forgotten Seraph-Kings
Still plot how God shall die."

We never sat in judgment on his bygone Anglican tastes or feelings or friends, because he had made them all stepping-stones to the fullness of belief, and one does not despise the ladder by which one has climbed. He could no more say a disparaging word about those things than he could abuse or trick an adversary in debate. But if occasion demanded, he could be definite enough. Here is his own account of himself translated from the French paper, *La Vie Catholique*, in 1925:

"Before arriving at Catholicism I passed through different stages and was a long time struggling. The various stages are hard to explain in detail. After much study and reflection, I came to the conclusion that the ills from which England is suffering: Capitalism, crude Imperialism, Industrialism, Wrongful Rich, Wreckage of the Family, are the result of England not being Catholic. The Anglo-Catholic position takes for granted that England remained Catholic in spite of the Reformation or even because of it. After my conclusions, it seemed unreasonable to affirm that England is Catholic. So I had to turn to the sole Catholicism, the Roman. Before my conversion I had a lot of Catholic ideas, and my point of view in fact had but little altered.

"Catholicism gives us a doctrine, puts logic into our life. It is not merely a Church Authority, it is a base which steadies the judgment. For instance, here everyone is writing about fashion, discussing short skirts, undressed women, but criticisms from no fixed standpoint. I'll tell you why: they don't know the meaning of chastity, whereas a Catholic does know, and so he knows why he condemns the fashions of to-day. To be a Catholic is to be all at rest! To own an irrefragable metaphysic on which to base all one's judgments, to be the touchstone of our ideas and our life, to which one can bring everything home."

To the correspondent of the *Toronto Daily Star* he said: "The change I have made is from being an Anglo-Catholic to being a Roman Catholic. I have always believed, at least for twenty years, in the Catholic view of Christianity. Unless the Church of England was a branch of the Catholic Church I had no use for it. If it were a Protestant Church I did not believe in it in any case. The question always was whether the Church of England can claim to be in direct descent from the mediæval

Catholic Church. That is the question with every Anglo-Catholic or Higher Churchman.

"Among the people who have most helped me to answer the question whether the Church of England is Catholic, and to whom I am most indebted, are the chief Protestant leaders in the Church of England, such as the Dean of St. Paul's and Bishop Hensley Henson. They have done me this good service, and I wish to express gratitude for it. They have done me the best service one man can do to another.

"It appears to me quite clear that any church claiming to be authoritative, must be able to answer quite definitely when great questions of public morals are put. Can I go in for cannibalism, or murder babies to reduce the population, or any similar scientific and progressive reform? Any Church with authority to teach must be able to say whether it can be done. But Protestant churches are in utter bewilderment on these moral questions—for example on birth control, on divorce, and on Spiritualism.

"You have people like Dean Inge coming out publicly and definitely to champion what I regard as a low and poisonous trick, not far removed from infanticide. It is perfectly true that there are in the Church of England and other Protestant bodies, men who would denounce these heathen vices as much as I can. Bishop Gore would speak about them as strongly as the Pope.

"But the point is that the Church of England does not speak strongly. It has no united action. I have no use for a Church which is not a Church militant, which cannot order battle and fall in line and march in the same direction."

Belloc writes, August 12th, 1922: "It is very great news indeed!—and you were the Agent therein. I send you my Act of Grace, typewritten because my eyes are bothering me, but it is as sincere as though I had written it by hand. I will shortly write you at greater length. I am overwhelmed by it. I have written to him."

August 23rd: "I still remain under the *coup* of Gilbert's conversion. I had never thought it possible!

"The Catholic Church is central, and therefore approached at every conceivable angle! I have written to him and shall write again—but I am a poor hand at such things."

August 25th: "The more I think on Gilbert the more astonished I become!"

September 9th: "I saw Gilbert two days ago. I went to stop a night with him. He is very happy. In the matter of explanation you are right. But I have no vision."

(Follows an exquisite tiny pengraph of a blind man led by a dog, and tapping with a stick.)

Once walking in Leeds with Belloc, when he had made me throw out my chest and swagger with him along Boar Lane, to the tune which he said the Gauls must have sung on their first invasion of Rome:

A peine issu de la vacarme
Que j'encoutraï, une vemm, sans charme
Une vemm' sans charme——

I sobered him down with:

Sleeps Hector on Scamander side
And Harold by the Sussex sea,
And Egypt's awful eyes undried
Above the bones of Antony——

He grasped my arm with: "Whose is that? Who wrote that?" "Why who could, except Gilbert?" said I. "Ah! the Master!" said Belloc. That Ballade is only to be found in the *Daily News*, perhaps 1908, and Chesterton said he had chucked it in ready-made, to fill up a column when he was pressed for time. Another day he was quoting me Belloc's sonnet to his wife:

When you to Acheron's ugly waters come
Where darkness is, and shapes of mourning brood——

When he stopped: "No one but Hilary can supply the right word in the second line,—that is as near as I can think of"—and Hilary took twenty years to get that second line to his taste, publishing long afterwards: "Where darkness is, and formless mourners brood".

No one ever enjoyed his verse more than Chesterton, or better relished the cameo quality in those sonnets, a form which he must have shrunk from himself. He had no instinct for staging or elaborating his effects, and many of his poems I worship for one or two lines only, which are fairly unapproachable. His few translations are a work of genius, to be read alongside the originals, that note may be taken of the wonderful way in which he reproduces the operative word and expands a subtle word into a perfect interpretation.

In *Dante* for instance:

Paradiso XXXIII, 49-78

Bernardo m' accennava, e sorridea
Perch' io guardassi suso: ma io era
Già per me stesso tal qual' ei volea!
Chè la mia vista, venendo sincera,
E più e più entrava per lo raggio
Dell' alta luce, che da se è vera.
Da quinci innanzi il mio veder fu maggio
Chè il parlar nostro ch'a tal vista cede,
E cede la memoria a tanto oltraggio.
Qual' e' colui che sognando vede

Chè dopo il sogno la passione impressa
Rimane, e l'altro alla mente non riede
Cotal son' io, chè quasi tutta cessa
Mia visione, ed ancor mi distilla
Nel cor lo dolce che nacque da essa.
Così la neve al sol si disigilla,
Così al vento nelle foglie lievi
Si perdea la sentenza di Sibilla.
O somma luce, che tanto ti levi
Dai concetti mortali, alla mia mente
Ripresta un poco di quel che parevi,
E fa la lingua mia tanto possente,
Ch'una favilla sol della tua gloria
Possa lasciare alla futura gente.

The version:

Then Bernard smiled at me that I should gaze,
But I had gazed already, caught the view,
Fac'd the unfathomable Ray of rays
Which to itself and by itself is two.

Then was my vision mightier than man's speech,
Speech snapp'd before it like a flying spell,
And memory and all that time can teach
Before that splendid outrage fail'd and fell.

As one who from a dream, remembers not
Waking, what were his pleasures or his pains,
With every feature of the dream forgot,
The printed passion of the dream remains,

Even so was I, within whose thought abides
No picture of the dream, nor any part,
Nor any memory: in whom resides
Only a happiness within the heart:

A recent happiness that soaks the heart
As hills are soaked by slow-insoaking snow
Or secret as that wind without a chart
Whereon the leaves of the wild Sibyl go.

O Light uplifted from all mortal moving
Send back a little of that glimpse of Thee,
That from the glory I may kindle glowing
One tiny spark for all men yet to be.

And this from Du Bellay:

Hereux qui comme Ulysse a fait un beau voyage

Ou comme cestui-là qui conquiert la toison,
Et puis est retourné plein d'usage et raison
Vivre entre ses parents le reste de son âge.
Quand revoirai-je, hélas, de mon petit village
Fumer la cheminée, et en quelle raison
Passerai-je le clos de ma pauvre maison
Qui m'est une province, et beaucoup davantage?
Plus me plaist le séjour qu'ont basti mes aieulx
Que des palais Romains le front audacieux:
Plus que le Marbre dur me plaist l'ardoise fine,
Plus le Loire français que le Tybre latin,
Plus mon petit Lyré que le Mont Palatin,
Et plus que l'air marin la douceur Angevine.

Happy who like Ulysses, or the lord
That raped the fleece, returning full and sage
With wisdom and the world's wide reason stored
Mid his own kin can taste the end of age.
When shall I see, when shall I see, God knows,
My little village smoke, or pass the door
The old dear door of that unhappy house
Which is to me a kingdom and much more?
Mightier to me the house my fathers made
Than your audacious heads, ye halls of Rome.
More than immortal marble undecayed
The thin sad slates that cover up my home.
More than your Tiber is my Loire to me,
Than Palatine my little Lyré there,
And more than all the winds of all the sea
The quiet kindness of the Avgevin air.

Why did he say his favourite line of poetry was "Over the hills and far away"?
Because all poetry is a freeing of the soul, and nothing does this more effectively
than the suggestion of swift motion over limitless tracts of land or sea or air. This
does not early come to children because they are busy exploring their world, and it is
big enough for them, for a time. That is why in composition they find it hard to make
a transition without walking the intervening space. The great poets have to teach
them, as Keats

Away! away! for I will fly to thee...
Already with thee. Tranquil is the night, etc.

and Milton:

Now that the heaven by the sun's beam untrod
Hath took no print of the approaching light
And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright.

As we grow up the love of distance and free flight steals upon us. Music best satisfies
this instinct, but for those who are tone-deaf that poetry which comes nearest to

music will do as well.

Oh hark! oh hear! How thin and clear
And thinner, clearer, farther going,
Oh! sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elf-land faintly blowing!

XXV.

It now seems strange that I saw him less after the memorable July Sunday when his genius consummated itself by entering the Kingdom of Heaven with the formalities of the Kingdom. I had an instinct that he ought to find out the best things for himself, and the dear soul went at it with a will, in three years producing his masterpiece, *The Everlasting Man*. It is in the middle, close and difficult reading because of the *density* of the matter. He took the whole jungle of Comparative Religion (the "Science" of) upon his hay-fork, and made hay. But anthologies not yet dreamed will produce pages as discoveries of what English prose can be. He had at last a thesis worthy of his declamatory powers, and he was not teaching himself philosophy, he had mastered all that. Peace! His triumph shall be sung by some yet unmoulded tongue, far on in summers that we shall not see.

Our talks were jollier on the rare occasions when we met, though he seemed to want to hold back and let me do the talking. Freely we chatted over the byways of theology and the points in the Resurrection-story which the Higher Critics never never thought of, as for instance, how anyone could get out of the city before sunrise; and again, the cumulative evidence for the Real Presence, not merely in the wonders of the Saints, but in the spirituality and innocence of the poor, and the purposed holiness of young children; the real scandals of Church History, inseparable from humanity in the mass, scandals which the enemy never saw and would not know if he saw them. His conversation no more than his style, lost anything in thirty-three years, and his attraction to the Universal remained the leading feature in his mental outlook. But in October, 1933, I noticed his breathing very laboured, and his slowness in converse very different from what I had always known. A winter trip to Italy improved him notably, and he was his old self again in March, 1934. I never saw him after that.

Early in 1936 he went to Lourdes and Lisieu, and was so much benefited, that his secretary tells me how, having a hundred and fifty miles of road to drive, she said: "Gilbert, sing us something". For the whole way he sang all he knew, repeated verses and cracked jokes, at the top of his form. A fortnight after his return home, he began to do what he had never done before, fall asleep whilst dictating. He next repeated himself in the same words, as if losing his grasp a little. So, as soon as he complained, he was put to bed, and on the doctor's verdict that he had just a sporting chance that the heart would rally, he was anointed and received his Last Communion on Friday

morning, June 12th and then was comatose with brief conscious intervals. In the afternoon, Fr. Vincent McNabb sang the Salve Regina at his bedside, the custom with dying Dominicans. On Sunday morning at 9.50 he gave his soul to God, of Whom he had been so constantly aware. Our children at St. Cuthbert's were just then praying for him at a Mass which I was celebrating for him. These details are of great import to those who know what we know, and that is why I mention them with care.

At the desire of the Archbishop of Westminster, I sang the Requiem Mass for him at Westminster Cathedral on Saturday, June 27th. It was the solemn commemoration of him by and for those who could not be present at Beaconsfield at his burial, myself for instance having been confined to bed all that week. The Deacon of the Mass was Dom Ignatius Rice, O.S.B., the Headmaster of Douai School, Woolhampton, one of his earliest admirers; and the Sub-Deacon was Father Vincent McNabb, O.P., who loved him with devotion, as did all his friends.

H. G. Wells is reported to have said (I heard it on the day at Westminster), "If ever I get to Heaven, presuming there *is* a Heaven, it will be by the intervention of Gilbert Chesterton". Bernard Shaw wrote a most touching letter to Mrs. Chesterton, bespeaking a heart as capacious as his head. Walter de la Mare wrote:

Knight of the Holy Ghost, he goes his way,
Wisdom his motley, truth his loving jest:
The mills of Satan keep his lance in play,
Pity and Innocence his heart at rest.

And his premature epitaph was beautifully brought up to date as follows:

Place upon his hand the jewel, on his brow the diadem.
He who lived in an age of miracles dared to believe in them.

Chesterton, companion
His companions mourn:
Chesterton Crusader
Leaves a cause forlorn.

Chesterton the critic
Pays no further heed:
Chesterton the poet
Lives while men shall read.

Chesterton the dreamer
Is by sleep beguiled,
And there enters Heaven
Chesterton the child.

Saved evermore from shock or strain he is, and the threat of imbecility sinks into nothingness, while genius kicks the beam.

XXVI

I must not close this patchwork narrative without an attempt at one consistent paragraph on Chesterton as I was privileged to know him. I have said already that even in his growing infirmity (and he was as fat as St. Thomas Aquinas), his nimbleness in the cause of courtesy was a recurring surprise. It was part of his philosophy, that unfailing consideration for others. He tells quite simply in the *Autobiography*, how he went through the pains of subjectivism, and finding that it gave him a pain, he emerged into the liberty of glory which philosophers class as Moderate Realism. The thing is what lets you play, and introspection is a servant, not a master. If you serve introspection you are in bondage to the narrowest of all things, which is Self. He discovered the right way in philosophy by trying the wrong ways first, for the wrong ways were all thrust upon him by Contemporary Thought.

His whole History of Mind is, could we see it clearly, a commentary on the Universe, seen and unseen. When philosophy begins, it is faced with a dilemma. Do I begin from thought within myself, or from reality outside my thought? If I choose my thought as the measure of reality, I am free to perish in the wilderness, if such freedom boots at all. If I choose Reality as the measure of my thoughts, I am not so free for empty speculation, but my philosophising will be fruitful because rooted in the soil, and I carry ballast, and do not capsize in a gale.

The Judæo-Christian tradition is that the Prince of this world, the Rebel Archangel, being God's masterpiece among creatures, was dazzled by his own light and chose himself to worship instead of the Only Worshipful; and even in this world, on the Hill of Temptation, it was once said to him: Begone, Satan. While Time shall be, and change (from which Philosophy is our only refuge in nature), this contrast must rage, and even Philosophy can be as mistaken as the Devil. This was the thesis which was always being tested behind those wonderful brows which were the glory of the face of G.K.C.

He knew enough to be content with not knowing everything. His God had given him the world to play with, and like God, he saw that it was good. He also saw that it is much too big to be taken into our bounded mind; that the least thing has fold on fold for our delight; and he calls it magic, the inexhaustible secret in common things, a secret never more than half-hidden, but never wholly manifest. This manifestation is the "garish day" which Newman hints it is unprofitable to love. Out of this clear view came his laughter, which he always insisted, was divine, the shout of joy of the sons of God.

Even when Philosophy has made the right choice at the very outset, Subjectivism is lying in wait for it when it comes to examine its own operations, and much error is due to the muddle of thinking how one thinks. It is the penalty of shirking the initial drudgery of Moderate Realism. That he was well aware of the snag is plain from his splendid prayer:

Give me miraculous eyes to see my eyes,
Those rolling mirrors made alive in me,—

Terrible crystal, more incredible
Than all the things they see.

He is quite soberly estimated by those who know best to be a portent of the *Philosophia Perennis*, since he discovered it himself and adorned it all his life, so that a Dominican professor said his works would do for footnotes to the *Philosophy of St. Thomas*. Thomas was so pleasant to even tiresome persons that he was called the Angelic Doctor. Call Chesterton the Angelic Jester. One of his largest jests was taking me for Father Brown. Here it seems good to add a ballade that sums up his whole career:

A Ballade of Ephemeral Controversy

I am not as that Poet that arrives,
Nor shall I pluck the laurel that persists
Through all perverted ages and revives:
Enough for me, that if with feet and fists
I fought these pharisaic atheists,
I need not crawl and seek when all is done
My motley pennon trampled in the lists
It will not matter when the fight is won.

If scratch of mine amid a war of knives
Has caused one moment's pain to pessimists,
Poisoned one hour in Social Workers' lives,
I count such comfort more than amethysts
But less than claret, and at after trysts
We'll meet and drink such claret by the tun
Till you and I and all of us (What? Hists!).
It will not matter when the fight is won.

When men again want women for their wives,
And even woman owns that she exists,
When people ask for houses and not hives
When we have climbed the tortured ivy's twists
To where like statues stand above the mists
The strong incredible sanities in the sun,
This dazed and overdriven bard desists.
It will not matter when the fight is won.

Envoi

Prince, let me place these handcuffs on your wrists
While common Christian people get some fun,
Then go and join your damned Theosophists.
It will not matter when the fight is won.

G.K.C.

Certain elephantine efforts were made at the outset of his career to trample his motley pennon before it could so much as be seen in the lists. In the sixth chapter of

the *Autobiography*, "The Fantastic Suburb", he sets forth with delighted penetration the British state of mind "in the ironical silence which follows the great controversy", when Agnosticism was the Established Religion. The next chapter is entitled: "The Crime of Orthodoxy". Amusing is the account of what persons and things led up to the crime and how the book was destroyed in Russia as it was guessed to be an attack upon the Russian Church. Mr. G. S. Street is blamed for bringing the book to be written, since he, when reviewing *Heretics*, "casually used the expression" that he would not bother about his theology until Chesterton had stated his. Readers of G.K.C. often miss the deeps because his brilliance flashes and dazzles so, but here is a scathing of G. S. Street and others, if they but knew. For it does appear that Chesterton has stated his theology and his philosophy in half a hundred volumes and in a great variety of poems, but G. S. Street has not yet so far condescended. This seems to have been a chronic ailment of the British public: it was the trammels of a reasonable service that they were perpetually shirking. So long as the sheep could run after the shadow of a shepherd, they did not care how soon they lost him and roamed again, bleating. They worshipped the noise of that bleat, and called it, maybe still call it, religion, or that in us which makes for righteousness. Chesterton was highly amused with my story of a friend, who, taking a young lady in to dinner one evening in London, was accosted thus: "I know you're a Roman Catholic, but what do you *really* think about Religion?" (This happened about the very time Chesterton was dealing faithfully with Blatchford in the *Clarion*.)

My friend was a bit of a wag, and answered with mighty carefulness: "To tell you the truth, I think it is an awful fraud". Sensation. "All but one religion. If you look at them all you will find them to be a kind of eye-wash for making us forget our sins. But to be a Roman Catholic is to be kept in constant mind of sin. It's a cursed nuisance; that is the real reason why people hate it so. Of course it's nothing when you're used to it——" but she had had enough, and serve her right.

XXVII

Street and the man in the street were fighting the rearguard action of that ragged army which was the ruined remnant of the established religion of Agnosticism which had gone to pieces by sheer force of incoherence. And whenever the light horse of Orthodoxy or right thinking bore down upon them, one or other was sure to cry aloud: They *really* belong to us, they do not *really* hold what they say they hold. It was said of Chesterton *ad nauseam*, for it is a dismally stale device, until it was seen not to cramp his hilarity one whit. He was especially amused that those who thought reality so scarce should be so in love with real reality, *la vraie vérité*, as to wonder how any thinking man could think the opposite of their thoughts, when the incapacity for thinking at all was what ailed them. Lest I should be suspect of talking through my hat, let me give the most perfect nonsense expressed in verse, years, I think, before *jabber-wocky* was thought of:

There is more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in all the creeds.

This was to Gilbert and me such pure and perfect jam that we kept it for tea-time always, and got our fingers sticky with it, and made door-knobs intolerable with it, just like a pair of spoiled children. Honest doubt? Dishonest doubt is seen pictured by G.K. in *The Life and Death of Emmanuel Burden*. What is honest doubt? Would you call a man honestly tuberculous if he were vain of it, and refused sanatorium treatment? Or would you call dipsomania honest booze?

At any rate, if honest doubt is so lovely and desirable why should we put it from us to the extent of believing *you*? You, who talk such sub-human bosh? What have the creeds ever done to deserve that you should be preferred to them? You and your doubts!

This is not the way we would have conversed with Tennyson because Tennyson was all his life much greater and deeper than that casual slip bespeaks him; but he had been for a moment captivated by what was in the air, mistaking snake's odour for musk. On a colossal scale has Chesterton disinfected literature of this kind of reek; if only by showing in his light-hearted way, the superior attraction of thought versus sentimentality, of perennial philosophy versus the hogwash of mutual admirations.

The semi-smart are still at it, it is their nature to be so. The false high-brow condemns tragedy for its lack of comic relief, and comedy for its lack of seriousness. So Chesterton's mastery in debate is disregarded or belittled as irresponsible, and they vote it his paradox to point out that the Missing Link is a long time missing. St. Thomas Aquinas has similarly been ignored for the opposite reason. His unrelenting rationality and calm are lacking—not in lightness of touch, but in gaiety. So solemnity calls Chesterton flippant, but refuses Aquinas for being consciously responsible and lucid and orderly. Like unto children playing in the market-place, they take turns at sulking.

XXVIII

It is easy now to laugh at the enemy from those ramparts which Chesterton has so gaily built about the City of God, but the "Don that durst attack my Chesterton" had a good deal of dull earth to heap upon him before his great bulk and still greater agility could bring him out on top. The *Times Literary Supplement* for October 1st, 1908, affords a sample of the sort of wisdom which set great store by itself.

"He is not a great teacher. He is a great entertainer. He is not a prophet. He is too entertaining. As journalism his writing seemed to have a permanent value; in book form it becomes ephemeral. *Orthodoxy* is a more powerful and concentrated essence of Chestertonianism, but it has a main thesis of a serious kind." (We miss our entertainer now, he is too serious.) "His motives in philosophy are in fact not

rational, but wholly aesthetic!" (Sold again! What is Beauty anyhow? Define your terms.)

"He refuses to believe in the first postulate of Science, the uniformity of Nature, it is too dull to believe in." (What about the famous passage about children wanting everything repeated, and God saying ever to Sun and Moon: Do it again!) This the reviewer actually quotes, but now "it is grotesque, and if you like, irreverent, but it is very fine; the only question is: does he believe it?" (We have to be Agnostics in order to know anything!) "The fact is Mr. Chesterton cannot believe or disbelieve anything, because his organ of belief has been displaced by his organ of preference." Here I had better leave the reviewer because he is obviously stewing in his own juice, reviewing so a book which the author *says* he has written in order to take stock of his beliefs and why he holds them. What is an organ of belief? "I don't tell the truth with my hands," said Alice. If you have an organ of anything, are you bound to be always using it? Is it necessary to point out that for his most ponderous self-contradictions the reviewer uses almost consecutive sentences? Even journalistic science was immoderately pleased, almost dazzled with Relativity (which all but scientific journalists had long known as a commonplace); dazzled with it because it "freed us from the trammels of wooden-headed Physics!"

Let us end where we began. On Keighley moor I wasted valuable opportunities of listening to Gilbert because I was loaded to the muzzle with views on the soft and yielding character of the Laws of Nature. "Science" only made them wooden so as to deny the possibility as well as the fact of miracle, and it was being ridden by its hobby when Einstein came along with a live horse and put Science up again.

It was very fresh in my memory at the time how I had met a doctor who was also a Justice of the Peace, on a Monday morning in a back street, over the dead body of a woman, to me reported to have only just dropped down dead. Fallen down the stone stairs, the neighbours said. I was prepared to anoint the senseless clay, but it was cold. Her husband had not been seen since Saturday night, and the doctor pointed out to me that the injuries were all on the back of the head. But what can we do? said he. Not a soul in this street will tell the truth—they are all ready with the same tale. Conversely I related how a disconsolate widow had rolled under the coffin whilst I was reading the Burial Service, and we all knew that the husband had died of ill-treatment long endured. But he was a very patient man. We agreed to class all these with Dooley's short and simple scandals of the poor. Gilbert's sense of wonder was thrilled to hear that I had twice been in touch with wilful murder, never proven.

The same doctor was deep in the confidence of one of the best policemen I ever knew. This officer was in charge of the station, and a citizen well-known and even looked up to, was brought in one night uproarious, resisting the police. (It might happen to the best of us, and the police know this.) In the morning, an S.O.S. was sent to the doctor to come at once upon the Bench as Court was opening very punctual. At 10.30 the prisoner was alone with the magistrate, charge was preferred. No defence. One and sixpence and costs. As the Court rose about 10.31 the public, including reporters, straggled in, knowing nothing of His First Offence.

We used to discuss literature, for the inspector was a mighty book-collector, "something to alleviate impending retirement", he used to say. It was his copy of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* that I read quite with such care as it deserves, and his Fraser's *Golden Bough* muddled my head enormously, so that I suggested Golden Rag-Bag as an improved title for the collective edition. He had a drawer full of blasphemous and seditious pamphlets, emanating all from a rival town, but they were not plainly enough over the edge to justify criminal proceedings. His wife used to sit with us when tidying up was over, the prettiest grandmother ever. "Shocking irregularities going on in those cells," said he, jerking his thumb at the iron door. "I caught a woman stealing my key and taking hot milk in the middle of the night to some of your Irish Drunks. She said she wanted them to be sober for their trial in the morning. But if I was to inform the Home Office I couldn't say what would happen to her. The worst of it is, she thinks nothing of wasting my substance. All the less for us to retire on." The woman was grandmamma, choking with laughter.

When this very good-natured man pointed out one of my flock as the "wickedest woman in Keighley", my vigilance was aroused, at least such vigilance as I possessed, to see if I could discover any redeeming features. I fear I never found any, as she was quite cynical with it all, and I do not know how she ended. But she had a grandson who played truant, and later on stole for her, and got sent to an industrial school. Five years after I met him in Heckmondwike, boarded out with a decent quiet family who found him steady and well-behaved until: One fine day he got the woman of the house out shopping; he found her keys, opened a drawer and took all the money he could lay hands on, and disappeared, leaving the bull-dog, a very friendly beast and devoted to him, with its throat cut. The heart of the mystery always was why he should have made away with the poor pet of the house. Perhaps he thought it was a bloodhound.

We discussed in the midst of these seamy disclosures that unnoticed paradox of the Gospel: Professional saints are scolded and threatened, whilst professional sinners are bidden to hope. This is all that I can honestly claim as a title to the character of Father Brown.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Certitude has a nerve. I have known amiable and cultured neuropaths who were incapable of certitude on anything except pain.

[2] *The Disentanglers* (Longmans).

[3] I remember pointing out how Christianity could never fail since it began with the perfect failure of Jesus of Nazareth.