

JANUARY 2025

# PHILADELPHIA CHESTERTON SOCIETY READING PACKET

## G.K.'s Weekly

No. 1.—Vol. I.

Week ending Saturday, March 21, 1925.

PRICE SIXPENCE.  
YEARLY (52 ISSUES)  
21 10 4.

Telephone No. City 1978.

Offices, 20 & 21, Essex Street, Strand, W.C.

### CONTENTS:

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE ... ..	8	FOUND WANDERING. By G. K. Chesterton ... ..	12
NOTES OF THE WEEK ... ..	6	POEM: The World State ... ..	13
FROM "G.K.'s WEEKLY" A HUNDRED YEARS AGO ... ..	8	PARLIAMENT FROM WITHIN. By Sir Henry Slesser, K.C., M.P. ...	14
WHY WEMBLEY WAS WOBBLY ... ..	8	POEM: The Old Gentleman in the Park ... ..	15
ANSWERS TO THE POINTS:		THE THIEF. By Walter de la Mare ... ..	18
The Skylark Replies to Wordsworth ... ..	9	THE DRAMA: Spring Cleaning—and Brinsley Sheridan. By J. K.	
The Sea Replies to Byron ... ..	9	Prothero ... ..	19
DON'T SAY IT ... ..	10	REVIEWS:	
POEM: The New Fiction ... ..	10	The White Monkey. By F. G. Bettany ... ..	20
THE BAG. By H. Belloc ... ..	11	Novels of the Day. By Louis J. McQuilland ... ..	21
POEM: True Sensibility ... ..	12	LIBRARY LIST ... ..	25

## THE FIRST PRINCIPLE.

### *G.K.'s WEEKLY AT 100 YEARS*

"So many papers have printed with legitimate pride an extract from their issue of the previous century that we cannot consent to begin publication without equipping ourselves with so normal a feature of journalism."

— *G.K.'s Weekly* (1925)

**FOR PRIVATE USE ONLY**

## ***INTRODUCTORY NOTE***

by Joe Grabowski

1925 was a significant year for G. K. Chesterton. That year not only saw the publication of what is widely regarded to be his *magnum opus*, *The Everlasting Man*; it also saw the formal launch of the periodical that would bear his name on the mast, *G. K.'s Weekly*. (In actual fact, the first “pilot” issues of the new magazine were issued in late 1924, but the formal first issue – Number 1, Volume 1 – was published in March of 1925.)

Apart from his ongoing contributions to other journals, notably *The Illustrated London News*, and his output in the form of books and short stories, Chesterton would write the bulk of the material in every issue of *G. K.'s Weekly* through the year of his death, 1936.

For our January 2025 meeting, the Philadelphia Chesterton Society looks at what was on Chesterton’s mind as the 20<sup>th</sup> century turned its first quarter, even as we mark the turn of the first quarter of our own century. We’ll read a selection of material from the launch of *G. K.'s Weekly* along with that week’s essay in the *ILN*, just to show *a part* of the volume of output Chesterton was churning out on a weekly basis at this period—just over 8,500 words in this selection alone! We will have particular fun looking at two imaginative writings from the period that saw Chesterton playing journalist a century earlier, for the year 1825, and a century hence, our current year, 2025!

\* \* \*

### ***“THE FIRST PRINCIPLE”***

Chesterton, G. K.. *G.K.'s Weekly*, No. 1-Vol. 1, March 21, 1925.

This single adventure in weekly journalism cannot compete with our wealthy and world-wide press in resources and reports. In the case of Russia our modest distinction is only this; that we are really concerned with the abuses of Bolshevism and not only with the abuse of it. When the Trade Union Report on the experiment in Eastern Europe came out and was considered in the press, the result was very interesting indeed; its very dullness was interesting. We think it highly probable that the Trade Union delegates did not understand the conditions in Russia. But we are sure they understood them a great deal better than their English critics understand the conditions in England. It is all very well to repeat distractedly, “What are we coming to, with all this Bolshevism?” It is as relevant to add, “What are we coming to, even without Bolshevism?” The answer is: Monopoly. It is certainly not “private

enterprise." The American Trust is not private enterprise. It would be truer to call the Spanish Inquisition private judgment. Monopoly is neither private nor enterprising. It exists to prevent private enterprise. And that is the present goal of our progress, if there were not a Bolshevist in the world. This paper exists to demand that we fight Bolshevism with something better than plutocracy. But anyhow we must get something better than silence about plutocracy. Compared with these evasions, the Trade Union Report is really a very philosophical document. It suffers of course from the faults of an age of very superficial philosophy. It is amusing to note the rather dazed solemnity with which the writers report the position of Woman in the new Russia. But in the same connection there was another reference that was not superficial but fundamental. In describing the marriage laws, which seem to be chiefly directed against marriage, the writers say that in this general divorce and dissolution it would certainly be hard for anyone to found a great family. That is precisely true and profoundly important. It marks again the narrowness of mere industrialism like our own, that the writer cannot really imagine any rooted family except a great family. But he is right about what made the family great. Aristocracy became powerful, much too powerful, because it did not consist of individuals, but had a name like a nation. Democracy will never become powerful unless every family is a great family. Perhaps it would have been better if the French Revolution had extended and not extinguished heraldry; if all the stormers of the Bastille, having undoubtedly borne arms, had borne armorial bearings. Anyhow, the State will always defeat the individual; if the citizen is to rule he must be more than an individual. But do we want him to rule? Bolshevism does not; and Bolshevism is not alone in that. It is absolutely certain that democracy will not be democratic unless it is domestic, because he does not want it to be democratic. That is the vital distinction between the two kinds of revolution. The old phrase Home Rule was really applicable to the revolt of a people who believe in homes. It is more doubtful if the *Daily Herald* will ever call itself the *Family Herald*.

The thing behind Bolshevism and many other modern things is a new doubt. It is not merely a doubt about God; it is rather specially a doubt about Man. The old morality, the Christian religion, the Catholic Church, different from all this new mentality because it really believed in the rights of men. That is, it believed that ordinary men were clothed with powers and privileges and a kind of authority. Thus the ordinary man had a right to deal with dead matter, up to a given point; that is the right of property. Thus the ordinary man had a right to rule the other animals within reason; that is the objection to vegetarianism and many other things. The ordinary man had a right to judge about his own health, and what risks he would take with the ordinary things of his environment; that is the objection to Prohibition and many other things. The ordinary man had a right to judge of his children's health, and

generally to bring up children to the best of his ability; that is the objection to many interpretations of modern State education. Now in these primary things in which the old religion trusted a man, the new philosophy utterly distrusts a man. It insists that he must be a very rare sort of man to have any rights in these matters; and when he is the rare sort, he has the right to rule others even more than himself. It is this profound scepticism about the common man that is the common point in the most contradictory elements of modern thought. That is why Mr. Bernard Shaw wants to evolve a new animal that shall live longer and grow wiser than man. That is why Mr. Sidney Webb wants to herd the men that exist like sheep, or animals much more foolish than man. They are not rebelling against an abnormal tyranny; they are rebelling against what they think is a normal tyranny; the tyranny of the normal. They are not in revolt against the king. They are in revolt against the citizen. The old revolutionist, when he stood on the roof (like the revolutionist in *The Dynamiter*) and looked over the city, used to say to himself, "Think how the princes and nobles revel in their palaces; think how the captains and cohorts ride the streets and trample on the people." But the new revolutionist is not brooding on that. He is saying, "Think of all those stupid men in vulgar villas or ignorant slums. Think how badly they teach their children; think how they do the wrong thing to the dog and offend the feelings of the parrot." In short, these sages, rightly or wrongly cannot trust the normal man to rule in the home; and most certainly do not want him to rule in the State. They do not really want to give him any political power. They are willing to give him a vote; because they have long discovered that it need not give him any power. They are not willing to give him a house, or a wife, or a child, or a dog, or a cow, or a piece of land; because these things really do give him power.

Now we wish it to be understood at the start that our policy is to give him power by giving him these things. We wish to insist that this is the real moral division underlying all our disputes, and perhaps the only one really worth disputing. We are far from denying, especially at this stage, that there is much to be said on the other side. We would rather insist that nearly everything that is said is said on the other side. We alone, perhaps, are likely to insist in the full sense that the average respectable citizen ought to have something to rule. We alone, to the same extent and for the same reason, have the right to call ourselves democratic. A republic used to be called a nation of kings; and in our republic the kings really have kingdoms. All modern governments, Prussian or Russian, all modern movements, Capitalist or Socialist, are taking away that kingdom from that king. Because they dislike the independence of that kingdom, they are against property. Because they dislike the loyalty of that kingdom, they are against marriage.

In this our first leading article we are most concerned to lay down that proposition; more concerned even than to provide it. That is what we think; and Bolshevism and Capitalism are absolutely at one in thinking the opposite. We shall answer in due course the arguments based on the weakness and vulgarity of the average citizen; we merely point out here that the arguments are based on that and nothing else. Both use the same argument against us; that a human life has now become impossible to humanity. We do not agree; we hold the old mystical dogma, that what a man has done man can do. They hold a rather more mysterious dogma; that man cannot do a thing because he has done it. But anyhow, it is a strange conclusion of the modern scientific advance that it leaves us with a choice between the impossible and the intolerable. For if we cannot go back, it hardly seems worth while to go forward. There is nothing in front but a flat wilderness of standardisation either by Bolshevism or Big Business. And it is strange that we at least have seen sanity, if only in a vision, while they go forward chained eternally to enlargement without liberty and progress without hope.

\* \* \*

### ***“FOUND WANDERING: HOW I TRIED TO BOOM THIS PAPER”***

Chesterton, G. K.. *G.K.'s Weekly*, No. 1-Vol. 1, March 21, 1925.

[Ed.: “*Found Wandering*” was Chesterton’s short-lived feature column in *G.K.’s Weekly* which within the year itself seemed to “wander” off the page; eventually it was revived, and maintained with more consistency, as “*Straws in the Wind*.”]

I have often told elsewhere the horrid tale of how this paper came to have its horrid title. It is enough to say here that I certainly never contemplated the title when I conceived the paper. I had always thought that there ought to be a paper expressing a certain serious body of opinion that has no other organ. But it were expressing mildly to state I am not a business man; and I had and still have to consult friends who are much more businesslike. When they answered my question by saying earnestly that the only way it could be worked would be as a personal organ with my initials on the front page, I naturally thought it was a joke. It has taken me two years to realise and be reconciled to the cold and blood-curdling fact that they really are practical men; and it is a practical joke. That practical joke is now in operation. The reader has seen the booby-trap at work; though I have disquieting doubts about who is the booby. I was too much exhausted with my hopeless struggle against business efficiency to resist the further outrage of my portrait being put on the outer cover of the first number. I am told that this also is a part of efficiency; though I have not the least idea of what it is supposed to effect. Perhaps it has something to do with the principle by which a dubious character is expected to put his photograph on his

passport. In that case, perhaps it would lie even better to have a large finger-print or an even larger foot-print.

And with these brighter thoughts my mood changed; and I began to see my duty in a clearer and more cheerful fashion. If I must sell the paper in order to spread the opinions, and perform these mysterious antics in order to sell the paper, I will cut my capers heartily and in a more varied and vigorous fashion. It is evidently no time to be hampered by my middle-class traditions. I must abandon all this affectation of the fine and fastidious self-respect of a Bohemian journalist of Fleet Street. I must be rolled in the mud just as if I were a great nobleman, a great Minister of State, the ruler of a historic nation or the bearer of a historic name. I must remember the washing baskets full of dirty linen that pass from the great houses to the law courts; I must remember the general change in the manners of the great. I have seen a fashionable lady, after a public dinner, set out a sort of dressing-table on the dinner-table and proceed to paint herself all the colours of the rainbow. I have often wondered what she would think if I took out a tooth-brush and a tube of tooth-paste and began to clean my teeth in the same public fashion; which would seem a much more normal and necessary proceeding after a meal. I have seen at the top of a column announcing the chief news of the day, in a great newspaper, several paragraphs devoted to describing how Mr. Winston Churchill insisted on having two or three more bathrooms in his private residence and personally supervised their erection, lest there should be too few of them. I do not know how the journalist could carry a trivial indignity much further, except by one of those triple snap-shots, showing the unfortunate politician taking three baths at once, and wearing a different sort of hat in each. I am capable of overflowing far more bathrooms than Mr. Churchill; but I will not pursue the parallel, beyond saying that I am quite willing that a picture of my hat should be substituted for a picture of my head. I am quite ready for anything, in the reckless reaction of my mood ; and I only wish to find relief by flinging myself with enthusiasm into the efficient side of the business. I wish to be a bustling business man ; a hustler ; a live wire. But it is nay melancholy duty to report that when I came back to my business advisers, bursting with brilliant suggestions for selling the paper like hot cakes, their reception of my hot cakes was decidedly cold.

For instance, I pointed out that to put my name, my initials and my portrait on the same page was as monotonous as the pattern of a wallpaper. It was to use vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do. There was no zip, no pep. none of the bright business qualities that I felt boiling within me at the moment. Now if there could only be a portrait of somebody else, with my name printed underneath it, the combination might possibly attract remark. Suppose a portrait of Mr. Compton

Mackenzie, for instance, who was to have written the principal article in the number but has been obliged to postpone it to a later one: the reader's attention might really be arrested by noting his much more distinguished appearance, his pointed beard and his strenuous elegance; and then reading underneath the simple words "Mr. G. K. Chesterton." I should like to pursue the policy for several numbers; varying the portrait with the same unvarying title; so that the faces of Lord Carson, Lord Beaverbrook, Sir Squire Bancroft, Mr. Amery and Sir Alfred Mond should successively look forth from the front page to adorn and illustrate the name of G. K. Chesterton. That might really arouse a certain stir of interest. That might really cause the simple to exclaim "I never knew he looked like that" and the obliging to send a snowstorm of letters into the correspondence column to correct the little error. The circulation among the people who like writing to correct a little error would alone be enormous. But when I urged this on my practical friends, who are so keen on publicity and advertisement, they said they could not conscientiously advise it. They have no true enterprise; no real fire. I admitted that there might be some danger of libel in calling a person G. K. Chesterton. It is not a thing to be said lightly of any man. I offered as an alternative to draw, myself, a series of symbolical portraits of myself; refined gentlemen with bald heads and black whiskers, far more likely to obtain the confidence of the business public; beautiful youths with Greek profiles, far more likely to give an air of hope and promise to the enterprise. All my inspirations fell back blunted from the deplorable conservatism of the business world. I was not even allowed to do what any tittle boy can do with the portrait of his sainted grandmother, and add large, bushy whiskers, horns, or other appendages; anything that would avoid the stale redundancy of the name and the portrait referring to the same man. One might almost use it as a threat or a form of blackmail: "Buy this paper or I will grow these whiskers." I remember that when Mr. Max Beerbohm grew a moustache (which I cannot but regard as a headlong fall from those high terraces of the eighteenth century, on which he moved with the combined traces of Beau Nash and Voltaire) I dreamed that some desperate measures might perhaps be taken to arrest the growth. I began to draw dreadful pictures on pieces of paper; showing what would have been the appearance of the most historic and famous clean-shaven persons if they had grown moustaches. Mr. Gladstone with a waxed moustache. Cardinal Manning with a curly moustache. Shelley with a heavy cavalry moustache. I do not know whether it would have turned back Mr. Max Beerbohm from the crime which he rushed away to hide in Italy; if indeed the terrible transformation did not take place in that land of magic and crime. Whiskers or a chin-beard might have been used perhaps with squally menacing effect in many cases; but hardly in mine, as I have no such eighteenth century outline to spoil. The only eighteenth century association I can boast is that some-body in a moment of

madness compared me to Dr. Johnson, which is enough to make that great man turn in his grave. Anyhow, I have often taken a walk down Fleet Street; but my attempt to rush madly down Fleet Street, in the capacity of an excited newsboy, was evidently not regarded as a success.

I had many other ideas of the same smart and commercial sort. Owing to the printers requiring the copy much earlier than had been expected, contributions from several distinguished writers have unfortunately been rather late for this issue. I had a wild temptation to write all their contributions myself and sign them with their names; to see whether I could write a poem by Mr. de la Mare, a story by Mr. Compton Mackenzie, a criticism by Mr. Maurice Baring, or what not. If I were Mr. J. C. Squire, I could forge a whole magazine complete from start to finish and nobody would ever know the difference; because the writers would want the credit of having imitated themselves so well. He could produce that little-known poem of Mr. de la Mare, so little known that it is as yet unknown to its author, which is called "Mare's Nests by Moonshine," and begins with an old man in a white hat finding the marks of horse-hoofs running straight up the grey-green trunk of a tree. He would be able to write the last chapter in the brilliant biography of Mr. Mackenzie's clergyman; the magnificent pageant of white and gold when the reverend gentleman is made Pope. He could imagine the next imaginary conversation of Mr. Maurice Baring; that cheery little chat between Goethe and Catullus and the world-famous Russian poet Mufisky, about the complete misunderstanding in England of the Slavonic system of punctuation. Best of all, if I were Mr. J. C. Squire, I could write a perfect imitation of Mr. J. C. Squire; and that is the author whom I like him best to imitate. Only if I were Mr. J. C. Squire, I should have an admirably conducted magazine of my own already; and this would not be G.K.'s WEEKLY, but The Mercury; and such inconsequent balderdash as this article would be very promptly and properly returned with thanks. Since, however, I have touched on that topic in a personal sense, I will add a word more upon the personal side of it. My colleagues in the more practical department will not resect the levity with which I have written here; for they have long learned to tolerate a levity which they probably associate with lunacy. But at least I have not taken liberties with their names as I have with those of poets and politicians; or compromised their business prospects and reputations for sanity by associating with myself and my scheme. But if there is one of my most practical advisers whom I may be allowed to name, it is one whom I have named already; a man without whose sympathy and good nature this number might never have been in print. And as a new book often recommends itself by inscription to a familiar name, I should like to dedicate this first number of the first volume of this weekly paper to Jack Collings Squire, a man active and adroit in so many fields, whose creative work creates and whose criticism criticises; an original



poet but a traditional judge; who is critical of all the thousand things in art and letters which it is his duty to criticise; critical of his criticisms; and, fortunately for some of us, not too critical of his friends.

\* \* \*

***“THE WORLD STATE”***

Chesterton, G. K.. *G.K.'s Weekly*, No. 1-Vol. 1, March 21, 1925.

Oh how I love Humanity  
With love so pure and pringlish:  
And how I hate the horrid French  
Who never will be English.

The International Idea,  
The largest and the clearest,  
Draws me to all the nations now  
Except the one that's nearest.

This compromise has long been known,  
This scheme of partial pardons.  
In Ethical Societies  
And small suburban gardens.

The villas and the chapels where  
I learned with little labour  
The way to love ray fellow-man  
And hate by next-door neighbour.

\* \* \*

***“WHY WEMBLEY WAS WOBBLY”***

Chesterton, G. K.. *G.K.'s Weekly*, No. 1-Vol. 1, March 21, 1925.

The immediate causes of the comparative failure at Wembley are pretty sure to be generally discussed. They will divide themselves into two classes; those that are too trivial to be investigated and those that are too important to be investigated. The former are familiar enough; everybody knows the man who is sure the thing would be a success if the palings were painted pink or if stilts were provided that shorter people might see the show; everybody knows the man who complains that when he

went there he slipped on a banana- skin or was not allowed to pay his entrance fee in half- penny stamps. But the other conception is at the very root of all our real politics; if anybody did cheat on a large scale in connection with the imperial show, he will not be punished; for cheating on a large scale is supposed to have something about it imperial and therefore impeccable. A Labour Member was speaking quite correctly when he said the other day that our Commissions of Inquiry are practically always whitewashing Commissions, from the Jameson Raid downwards. We have never punished a big profiteer; a fact that would have astounded our ancestors and may astound our descendants. But the very mention of the Jameson Raid reminds us that there are causes much more radical which will seem to many much more remote. The Wembley Exhibition was noisy with every new invention and pushing enterprise; but its weakness was that it was out of date. The sort of imperial sentiment it appealed to was the sentiment of thirty years ago, when a Kruger loomed larger than a Kaiser, when we did not know what dreadful thing was really meant by painting the map red; when the Cape to Cairo continent seemed really bestridden by the Colossus of Rhodes.

Now the English are of all men the most moody. The fact is disguised merely because their gesture happens to be heavier or slower than that of Latins or Americans. The Englishman thinks that the Frenchman is always gesticulating or the American always hustling. But that very fact ought to show him that the American or the Frenchman is always the same. But the Englishman is not always the same. He has numberless and nameless moods; that do not appear very much in the trivial English talk, though they do appear in the very elemental English poetry. One disadvantage is that these moods which are not often described, and never defined, can seldom be recovered. In our judgment the mood of 1914 was a very noble mood. In our judgment the mood of Mafeking Night was a very ignoble one. But neither the noble nor the ignoble mood can be exactly recovered; and the ignoble mood is fortunately much further away. If our mood is no longer in the last poems of Rupert Brooke, it is not likely to be in the first poems of Rudyard Kipling.

That was the real weakness of Wembley; that it so completely mistook the English temperament as to appeal to a stale mood. It appealed to a stale mood of success; when we need to appeal to a new and more noble mood of failure, or at least of peril. The English did not understand being asked to boast of a Burmese house when they were houseless, or admire the works of Colonial genius when they were out of work. But we believe they would understand being told that, homeless and workless, they were still English, and that England herself was being driven out of house and home. They no longer care to be told of an Empire on which the sun

never sets. Tell them the sun is setting, and they will fight though the battle go against them to the going down of the sun: if they do not stay it, like Joshua.

There are two reasons to be given when we are rallying men round a flag; first that it is victorious and second that it is defeated; or at least in danger of being defeated. But you cannot rally people to something that is already defeated, and continues to deny even the danger of defeat. A man can call upon his friends because things are all right or because things are all wrong. But he cannot attract them to things merely because they are all wrong, while he continues to declare they are all right. It is vulgarly said that a man appealing for help must either be in rags and realistically starving, or else dressed expensively and even extravagantly in the very latest fashion. But he cannot impress anybody by being dressed extravagantly in what is no longer the latest fashion. He cannot impress anybody by being at once dressy and dowdy. And that is the effect now produced by England plastering herself with the diamonds of the Diamond Jubilee or the gold of the South African War. The parallel is not perfect; for fortunately the world is not perfectly practical and businesslike yet. The really efficient man of business would no doubt sack his own father as inefficient, unless he dressed up to the nines and dyed his hair to avoid being too old at forty. But his attitude towards his father would hardly be our attitude towards our fatherland. We should not judge England our mother by so rapid and resolute a test; she would, let us hope, be sufficiently sacred to us if she did appear in rags and starving; as desolate as Poland sitting among her ruins; as bent and withered as the little old woman whom the Irish call Kathleen-na-Hulahan. But, anyhow, we should regret much more her appearing in clothes that were flashy without being fashionable; something that was fast and yet left far behind. There is no advantage in looking worldly in what is no longer the way of the world; in appealing to practical things that are no longer really in practice. And that is the impression produced just now by the British talking about the British Empire or counting the Colonies like jewels in its crown. They are the old Kimberley diamonds; and the style of the setting is no longer admired. This does not mean that we need no longer love things that are old-fashioned; but it does mean that we can no longer praise them as fashionable, or push them as fashionable. In other words, we come back to the other view of our power in the past and to the other reason for rallying to it. It must be one or the other; and as things stand, we ourselves believe that it must be the other.

Now no nations have ever been loved and served like the unhappy nations. The moment the nation is admittedly unlucky, men will always stake their lives and fortunes for her. Ten thousand swords will leap from their scabbards, as if misfortune were a magnet attracting steel. The amount of energy and suffering put into the long effort of Poland or Ireland, to shift one dead-weight of a stone, would

seem enough to have steered a planet. But to have this devotion a nation must need it; a nation must ask for it. England does need it; but she does not ask for it. It is assumed that she must go on making a failure or an attempt to look like a success; instead of possibly making a success of the forlorn hope that can retrieve failure. The Englishman must continue to swagger as a capitalist with no capital; and go on being purse-proud with an empty purse. He must boast that he has a big Empire, even at the moment that he is driven to have a small Navy. He must swagger about the Colonies he has made, though it be as a bankrupt squire swaggering over the land he has mortgaged. He must be hated by the poor for a wealth that he has not got; and still disliked by the foreigner for a superiority he can no longer feel. This is what our Americanised press recommends to us as "Optimism": it is making the worst of all possible worlds.

We seriously propose that England should take her stand among the unhappy nations; it is too dismal a fate to go on being one of the happy ones. We must be as proud as Spain and Poland and Serbia; nations made more dear to their lovers by their disasters. Our disasters have begun; but they do not seem to have endeared us to anybody in particular. Our sorrow has come; but we gain no extra loyalty by it. The time has come to claim our crown of thorns; or at least not to cover it any longer with such exceedingly faded flowers.

\* \* \*

### ***"DON'T SAY IT"***

Chesterton, G. K.. *G.K.'s Weekly*, No. 1-Vol. 1, March 21, 1925.

We beg officially to announce, in the exercise of the prophetic office, that somebody will shortly utter a loud scream, somebody will be strangled, stabbed, or otherwise murdered, the town will be blown up with dynamite, the end of the world will come, or something else will happen to indicate that the last limit of human endurance has been reached, if any-body anywhere says only once more any one of the following things.

*"We are only at the beginning of the wonders of the wireless telegraphy."*

This misses the point to the point of falsehood. The truth is quite the other way. The first whisper of such things really is wonderful. The rest is merely application; it is doubtful if the applications are any more wonderful; and it is certain that we do not go on wondering. The first man in London to use a telephone and talk to an hotel-keeper in Brighton probably did feel that the far-off voice was a miracle. But it is simply not true to say that we go on for ever saying "I can talk to

the hotel-keeper; but surely not to the tobacconist! Surely, surely, not to the tailor! Do not tell me it is possible to talk also to the hatter! Wonder of wonders, the principle actually applies to the greengrocer! "Hearing a human voice over the hills and far away is marvellous; but hearing everybody in the directory is not any more marvellous; and nobody ever marvels at it. The principle is of some spiritual importance. Without it science becomes a scheme for creating wonders and destroying wonder. It is perpetually kicking down the starry ladder by which it scales the sky. The real lesson of such marvels is not in merely going forward to fresh things that instantly become stale things. Rather it is in going backward to make the stale things fresh. It is marvellous to fly if it reminds us that it is marvellous to move; and therefore marvellous to walk. So it is matter of admiration that we should hear without wires; but also most admirable that we should hear with wires; and most admirable of all that we should hear with ears. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

*"We are beginning to recognise that religion must accept the conclusions of science."*

When we read this in the leading article every morning, we never seem to have sufficient scepticism or liveliness in us to ask the obvious question about it. That religion may accept the conclusions of science, it is necessary that science should conclude. And science never does conclude. It is the whole claim and boast of science that she never does conclude. To conclude means to shut up; and the very last thing the man of science is likely to do is to shut up. When we say "You must accept the conclusions of the Court of Chancery" we mean something by it. We mean that even a Chancery suit does come to an end at last. When we say that we must accept the conclusions of the Home Secretary, we mean something very practical indeed. We mean that a particular man will be hanged on a particular morning, not having sufficient social influence to get his insanity accepted as one of the conclusions of science. We mean that when he has been hanged, it becomes a delicate matter to offer him an apology. But it is the whole point of science never to be in this sense final or irrevocable. Of course, this does not mean that we shall not work more wisely if we work in the light of the suggestions of science, or take note of the general tendencies of science. It only means that the people who use these words ten thousand times a year have not taken note of what they are saying. As a matter of fact, if men had altered their doctrines to suit discoveries, they would often have had to alter them back again, when the discoveries were, so to speak, un-discovered again. Religion was asked to accept the conclusions of science, when science no longer accepted the conclusions of science. But the main point is not a particular one of science but a general one of reason. If science had concluded, it would mean almost literally that science had shut up shop.

*“America has the faults of a young nation”* or sometimes *“one of the new nations.”*

As a matter of fact, this is not the case. America has the faults (and the virtues) of a nation in many ways very backward and old-fashioned; in which many things remain that Europe has left behind. Where else in the world would people be alarmed at the sudden appearance of Mr. Charles Darwin, that rising young biologist? Where else would he still be giving shocks to Puritans who take for granted that absolutely materialistic version of the Hebrew Scriptures, which St. Augustine said was too childish to be considered? With us Darwin is a venerable Victorian memory that is defended like a religion; with them he is still a revolution. With us he is riddled by the rising generation; with them he is still being frowned down by the older one. Where else in the world do people still really and truly believe in the story of the Industrious Apprentice as narrated by Hogarth? Where else can they persuade themselves that if all the apprentices were industrious, they would all be mayors or millionaires? Where else do men still hold the views of the Manchester School, which have long disappeared from Manchester? They have not disappeared from Massachusetts. Where else is Socialism a secret of juvenile dynamiters, instead of being, as with us, an affectation of aged dons? In some ways there is splendid activity in the United States. But there is not in that sense much intellectual activity among the Americans, or among the people who talk in that way about America.

\* \* \*

### ***“THE IDEAL OF A LEISURE STATE”***

Chesterton, G. K.. “Our Notebook” for *The Illustrated London News*, Vol. 1, March 21, 1925.

Among the strange and stiff antics of the rather antiquated art of party journalism is the duty laid upon a good party man of trying to disagree with his opponents when they have the impudence to agree with him. He not only has to insist that they are wrong; he has to deny their right to be right. Even when you have to admit that your antagonist is talking sense, even when you pride yourself on talking exactly the same sense, you have to deny that it is sensible of him to talk sense. Or you deny that it is sense in the same sense; or sense in the true sense of the word. More often you simply imply that it is inconsistent and irrational in him to talk sense, because it is his whole duty and high function in the State to talk nonsense. It is his business to be wrong; it is his business to be beaten; he is the invisible playmate, who sides with the Frenchman and never can win. That he should suddenly side with his own country, or win the approval of his own critics, is regarded as a form of cheating. Twice lately I have noticed a party leader saying things that any sensible person would say, but not allowed by the Opposition Press to

say them, because he was not supposed to be a sensible person. One was when Mr. Baldwin pointed out the appalling peril of directly declaring war on all Trade Unionists at the very moment when we are supposed to be persuading them not to be Bolshevists. The other was when Mr. George Lansbury said in effect that the dole was a deplorable necessity, because every man in the world ought to grow up expecting to work. But the conventional journalists, instead of agreeing with Mr. Lansbury, sneered at him for agreeing with them.

Well, that way of working against Bolshevism will have its Nemesis; the Nemesis of all nonsense, which is neglect. A new generation will go straight to the problems and forget all about the party quarrels. If we want to know what the future will be like, so far as anybody can know it, we must begin at the springs of thought and theory, the sources of the river, and not merely potter about in the swamps where it straggles away into its last labyrinthine delta of lobbying and intrigue. We must consider what ideas there are in the world at present, and in what way they are likely to mould the future. Now Mr. George Lansbury, whether consciously or not, really touched on one of the most important of these intellectual conflicts, which so often precede political and even military conflicts. And the position which he took up upon that matter was that of a conservative or a traditionalist; or, as some on the other side would say, of a Tory.

The controversy I mean has nothing to do with Socialism or Capitalism. It is a question about the nature of human life, even of ideal human life, which cuts across all these things and would probably divide Socialism into two camps. It is something which some speculators have already begun to discuss under the name of "The Leisure State." It is something which was suggested, perhaps, in the title and work of Mr. H. G. Wells called "The World Set Free." It does not mean the world set free from the sceptre or the sabre; it means the world set free from the spade and the ploughshare. It means that it might be possible so to organise machinery that the whole life of man on the earth should be one of leisure and not of labour. I will not pretend to discuss whether it would be mechanically possible. But it is time we began to discuss whether it is morally desirable. I am entirely at one with the Socialists in wishing to give most men less work and some men more work. But the abstract question propounded here is not that question; it is whether, if we could, we would give nobody any work. It assumes for the sake of argument the dark and dubious principle that labour-saving devices will save labour. It asks whether, even then, we always want to save labour. We talk of paying too much for labour; should we or should we not pay too much for idleness?

Many of the idealists can only conceive an idle humanity as an ideal humanity. They talk as if no man could ever rest until he reached Utopia; or as if a

really long holiday were something like heaven, utterly distant and divine. Their social philosophy is that of the hearty and humorous epitaph of the charwoman, who had gone to do nothing for ever and ever. But even now it is by no means certain that those who are not charwomen really become any more hearty and humorous by doing nothing for ever and ever. A vast amount of stuffy and sentimental humbug has been uttered in favour of the Gospel of Work. As it was said that Carlyle talked a great deal in praise of silence, it may also be respectfully affirmed that he idled away a great deal of his time meditating on the virtues of labour. Work is not necessarily good for people; overwork is very bad for people; and both often begin with a bad motive and come to a bad end. Many a modern industrialist has prided himself on being as industrious as he was industrial. And it meant little more than that he was ready to sweat himself, as well as his neighbours, when he wanted to swindle his neighbours. Many a modern man has lived by the Gospel of Work, when it meant the spirit that will always work against the Gospel. A great deal of harm has been done by setting up these oily machines as models for mankind. I would not point to these ideal industrious men; I would turn away men's eyes from the painful picture of the Industrious Apprentice; I would veil their faces lest they should be disturbed by the repulsive appearance of the man who Attended These Classes and Is Making Big Money Now. I would hastily remove this deplorable person; but I would gently remind the Utopians that he is not the only kind of person who is deplorable.

Now, the Leisure State exists already. It can be seen represented at any sort of function such as is called a State Banquet or State Ball. The World Set Free exists already. It exists in the world that specially claims to call itself the world. It exists in the world which Socialists and Utopians specially claim to call worldly. We are in a position even now to judge pretty well, in a general fashion, what is the effect on human beings of having nothing particular to do. The "world" is already set free, if that is freedom; but is it exactly what the Utopians want to demand as freedom? It is undoubtedly an idle society, but is it an ideal society? Is Utopia to be found in Belgravia any more than in Bohemia? Are the rich all good or better than anybody else? Are they all clever or cleverer than anybody else? Are they even all free and happy, or all freer and happier than anybody else? And though there are good and clever and free and happy people among the idle rich, as there are among the idle poor, not to mention the industrious poor, I think it is broadly true that most of us have found that the most sincere and sensible people were people who earned their own living. I agree therefore with Mr. Lansbury in differing from those who would perpetuate eternal unemployment combined with universal doles, and who call that ignominious combination The World Set Free.



But there is another strong objection which I, one of the laziest of all the children of Adam, have against the Leisure State. Those who think it could be done argue that a vast machinery using electricity, water-power, petrol, and so on, might reduce the work imposed on each of us to a minimum. It might, but it would also reduce our control to a minimum. We should ourselves become parts of a machine, even if the machine only used those parts once a week. The machine would be our master; for the machine would produce our food, and most of us could have no notion of how it was really being produced. A free man would rather be a peasant rising at dawn to put in more work on his own field. In other words, in the social formula to which we are all accustomed, the peasant has control over the means of production. The occasional adjunct to the intermittent machine would have no control whatever over the means of production. He might have more control over his own leisure, but less over his own life. Machinery organised in that fashion would have to be organised from an official centre; and could no more be controlled by its adjuncts than the tiniest of the little wheels can wind up a watch. The leisured persons might be many things in their long hours of leisure. It is not impossible, by the parallel of plutocracy, that they might be profligates, perverts, drugtakers, dram-drinkers, pessimists, and suicides. But they might all be poets and artists and philosophers. They would not be citizens.

\* \* \*

**“FROM G.K.’S WEEKLY A HUNDRED YEARS AGO”**

Chesterton, G. K.. *G.K.’s Weekly*, No. 1-Vol. 1, March 21, 1925.

*[So many papers have printed with legitimate pride an extract from their issue of the previous century that we cannot consent to begin publication without equipping ourselves with so normal a feature of journalism; and our first issue seems the most appropriate moment for this slightly sentimental retrospect. After all, everybody seems to have a centenary in these days without any particular difficulty. We are all centenarians now.]*

**March 21, 1825.**—Nearly ten years have passed since that glorious afternoon in summer, when Wellington and Blücher met and cemented an eternal peace between Prussia and England. Hopes of such a permanent peace, held out by the Holy Alliance, have not been contradicted by any great convulsion; and it seems probable that the conflict that ended at Waterloo may prove to be, in the witty phrase of an aged Russian diplomatist at the Council of Vienna, “the war that will end war.” The anxious considerations that now weigh down a patriotic heart relate to the conditions of the country itself, so often forgotten in the glow of patriotism. That ingenious person, Mr. Bentham, delights to demonstrate that men only pursue their

own interest in supporting an ordered society; in which case there would seem to be something highly and dangerously disinterested about the conduct of the landlords who set man-traps and the tenants who burn hay-ricks. We have never joined in the universal invective against Mr. Cobbett, many of whose strictures seem to us to reflect credit on his head as well as his heart; but we cannot but think him guilty of an exaggeration sometimes degenerating into enthusiasm (like that of the Methodists whom he loves to castigate) when he attributes so much of the evil to the prevalence of paper money. We allow for his rhetorical figures and highly coloured style; but there are conceits that appear incredible even when treated as tropes; and sometimes, in reading Mr. Cobbett, one would really imagine that a hundred years hence such a thing as a gold piece would never be seen in England; and that anyone dealing in some modest sum like ten shillings would solemnly present his neighbour with a piece of paper! The best students of political economy assure us that free competition, unhampered by any State interference, will soon find for every man the work for which he is most suited. But even the assurance of the whole population, in the year 1925, being in regular employment under merchants whose businesses will show a continually increasing security and prosperity, does not altogether reconcile us to the disappearance of the English yeoman and the systematic destruction of commons and rights of way. We are sorry to have nothing to oppose to predictions so solid and authoritative, except these sentimental regrets and these formless forebodings.

\* \* \*

**“FROM G.K.’S WEEKLY A HUNDRED YEARS HENCE”**

Chesterton, G. K.. *G.K.'s Weekly*, No. 2-Vol. 1, March 28, 1925.

**March 28, 2025.**— . . . Professor Chew is already famous among the Higher Critics for his reconstruction of the history of St. Joan or Joanna, to whom he has assigned a date much later than that of the orthodox tradition; such documents as have survived the Great Change indicating that the canonisation following on her rehabilitation can definitely be fixed in the twentieth century. Moreover it is clear that the most enlightened classes knew nothing of her until her cause was championed by Bernhardt Shaw, the famous German propagandist. Her surname seems to have been Southcott, though she was sometimes called “of the Ark” in reference to the sacred box that contained her scriptures. The Church is much criticised for still stubbornly refusing to accept these results of research; especially since Professor Chew’s final discovery about the oil-fields of Champagne. He points out that the affair obviously happened under the dynasty of the Oil Kings, which preceded our present royal

house of Rubber Kings; since there is definite reference to Joanna making a king at Rheims through the power of oil.

His new work is concerned with his old thesis that our present system is much older than is commonly supposed; and that the alleged period of anarchy, in which economic and sexual actions were left to the caprice of individuals, was altogether legendary. He points out that there is no official record of the alleged "love-making" and personal proposals of marriage in any of the State papers or government reports; and that these individual adventures are only recorded in the "novels" or narratives of the period, which are full of improbable events. "To ask us to believe," he concludes, "That a man felt a personal attraction to a woman at the same time as the woman to the man, and that this occurred continually throughout society, is to ask us to believe that society was founded on a coincidence." He points out, more over, that as men are not equal in attractive power, any more than in money making, all the attractive men would have had enormous harems and all the unattractive have remained celibate. In this there is probably some exaggeration: the professor hardly allows for a readiness for such reciprocation in normal psychology. We suspect that in the Victorian time polygamy in a legalised sense was the exception rather than the rule.