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PHILADELPHIA CHESTERTON SOCIETY READING PACKET



CHESTERTON IN AN ELECTION YEAR

“Perhaps the principal objection to a quarrel is that it interrupts an argument.”

- GKC, *Autobiography*

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“THE PROHIBITION CRISIS AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY”

Chesterton, G. K.. For *The Illustrated London News*, 28 July 1928.

Paradoxical as it may seem, there is one thing in the world that is more absurd than Prohibition, and that is the legal position of Prohibition. The point of this distinction is very well embodied in what is called the Butler Resolution, which was moved by Professor Nicholas Murray Butler, the distinguished scholar, at a recent Congress of the Republican Party. He did not raise at all the moral question of whether men should or should not drink; or even the political question of whether governments should or should not forbid drink. He simply pointed out what were the normal and appropriate governments to forbid it. He wanted the question settled, as every other such social question is settled, by the lawful local government of the several States of the Union. If these States think their citizens are in danger from bad milk or rash motoring, these States would see to it. If these States think their citizens are in danger from fermented liquor, let them see to it. That is the Butler Resolution; that is practically also the Smith Programme, and that is simply elementary sanity.

The one way in which the great American Republic did really make a public and palpable fool of itself, before all the nations of the earth, was not merely in enforcing a Moslem morality on a Christian people. It was primarily and particularly in making that fad or scruple a part of the Constitution. For that really suggested that the legislators did not even know what is meant by a Constitution. It is a great pity; it is even a great tragedy. For not only have the Americans always been sincerely loyal and devoted to their Constitution, but their Constitution is really worthy of such loyalty and devotion. It is, or rather, it was - a large, luminous, and wisely balanced thing, founded on ideas intelligible and indestructible, and having for its preface one of the noblest proclamations in the radiant English of the eighteenth century. But a Constitution is simply the statement of how laws are made. It has no business whatever with saying which laws should be made; still less with saying that one particularly silly law must never be unmade. The Prohibition Amendment was as muddle-headed as the Declaration of Independence was clear-headed. It was as muddle-headed as a man who should mix up a plan of a sausage-machine with a recipe for a sausage.

The British Constitution is far less constitutional than the American Constitution. Still, we may say broadly that we are all governed by Act of Parliament, which must be the Act of the King, Lords, and Commons in Parliament assembled. But even in our most illogical moments we should not venerate a jurist who said, “I define the British Constitution as consisting of King, Lords, and Commons, and as something that shall stop the motor-buses making such a noise in Ealing Broadway.” We should be disappointed if, on consulting Coke or Blackstone,

we found the statement, "It is the Constitution of this realm that all is by Act of Parliament, which should have the consent of the Three Estates and which should as soon as possible stop the organ-grinders from playing under my window." That is the American position, which sensible Americans wish to alter, that we all may once more respect their country, and they may once more respect their Constitution.

Upon this particular point of Prohibition, Professor Butler, though a Republican, cannot, of course, speak for the Republican Party. Nor, I suppose, can even Governor Smith actually speak for the whole of the Democratic Party; but he is naturally much more corporately representative of it. The fanatical Prohibitionist in either party would presumably be opposed to any such policy. But then the fanatical Prohibitionist, with all respect to him, would be a fool wherever he was; and I do not believe that the great Democratic Party will lend itself to the highly democratic generalization that democracy is mostly fools. The fanatical Prohibitionist will be unable to think of anything except Prohibition. But Governor Smith is not thinking primarily of Prohibition or the repeal of Prohibition. He is thinking of this other and very vital question of the reasonable assertion of States rights, the ancient policy of the Democrats which descends from Jefferson and the heroic age. Governor Smith said the other day, with unanswerable commonsense, "New York cannot impose local rules for Oklahoma, or Montana for Florida." Anybody who has been in America can testify to the reality of the strain which a rigid centralization will impose on whole districts sometimes as large as nations, and nearly as different as nations. There is at this moment a severe strain between the Puritanism of the Middle West and the Paganism of the New York social life. I am not sure that it is not more truly spiritual a schism than the old schism between the North of Lincoln and the South of Lee. Certainly Lee and Lincoln would have agreed much more on a common code of morals than do, let us say, Sinclair Lewis and Billy Sunday. There is another great religious frontier created by the advance of the Irish and the Italians. It seems to me that Mr. Smith is acting after the manner of a very wise statesman (a rare thing in these days) when he insists that the Republic must ride local differences with an easier rein, and give elbow room to varieties of culture, if it is to avoid another great internal split, such as once started down in South Carolina and nearly rent the citadel of Washington. "Reasonable differences of viewpoint in widely different sections must be recognised if we are to preserve national unity."

In our industrialized and over-centralised modern nations in the future, the revolutions may not be exactly like those of the past. The thing called Secession may not take precisely the form of what was once called the Civil War. I wish to heaven it might take any form so chivalrous and picturesque. It may be that America shall not behold again the bayonet-charge of Bull Run or the last battles in the Wilderness, any more than England will see again the exact reproduction of Naseby and Newbury, or

Scotland of Killiecrankie and Culloden. But States can die of disruption by many processes besides battle; by prolonged strikes and lock-outs, by widespread secret societies, by the stranglehold of financial power, by the general boycotting of the law, by mere neglect and anarchy and refusal of patriotic service. The more a modern State has of territory, the more it has of variety. The more it has of variety, the more it has of this particular peril of variety. And if Governor Smith had done nothing else to deserve well of his country (and he has already as Governor done more than many Presidents), his fellow-citizens would owe him something for having seen so clearly, and stated so emphatically, this truth which millions cannot see. He has simply reaffirmed the truth in the very title of the United States. They must be States if they are to be United.

I should not venture to give my opinion on a foreign question like this, if the opposite opinion were not perpetually poured out without hesitation or apology. It might be very good advice to an Englishman that he should keep quite clear of the American Party System. If it comes to that, it is equally good advice to an Englishman to keep clear of the English Party System. But, as a fact, the Englishman does neither, and the former even less than the latter. About England he has heard both sides, about America he has almost always heard one side. The average newspaper-reader knows much less of the case against Lincoln than of the case against Gladstone. He has heard of "Tax the Foreigner" and "Don't Tax the People's Food." But he only knows that the North was fighting for Freedom and not that it was fighting against Free Trade. He has heard about the rights of the Slaves, never about the rights of the States. In short, the Englishman has been made an American Party Man, and always a Northern Republican. I write these words to correct the balance, for if we do not understand the Democracy of Al. Smith, we shall be blind at one of the crises of history.

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"PROHIBITION AND THE AMERICAN ELECTION"

Chesterton, G. K.. For *The Illustrated London News*, 15 September 1928.

I have certainly never pretended to be a prophet: least of all a political prophet. For politicians, a jumpy race, are always trying to anticipate which way the cat will jump: and the cat (a sagacious but aggravating animal) very often does not jump at all. I make no claim to calculate the incalculable; but it is at least a quaint coincidence that, after I noted in this column the resemblance between a motion moved by an eminent professor at the Republican Convention in America, and the general policy of the opposite party, that same professor has sensationally separated himself from his own party and openly supported the other. I thought it interesting

that Governor Smith seemed only to be saying to the whole nation what Professor Nicholas Murray Butler was saying to his fellow-Republicans; and now Professor Butler has boldly rallied to the cause of Governor Smith. Two men more totally different, to be both in their several ways respected, we can hardly imagine. For one is of the sort that the foes of popular life call a demagogue; the other of the sort that the foes of academic life deride as a don. Even foes may surely be interested in the points on which the don and the demagogue agree.

It is the more amusing when we consider the objections actually raised against the Democratic candidate for the American Presidency. For there seem to be a number of well-defined objections to Governor Al Smith. One complaint is that he is by birth or family or economic circumstances as rough and obscure as Abraham Lincoln. One obstacle is that a citizen who has risen from being a poor boy selling newspapers cannot be a fit representative of a great individualistic democracy. Another is that his political party was connected with Tammany Hall; and the old tales of its corruption naturally shock and horrify the sensitive and incorruptible idealists of the Oil Scandal and the Tea-Pot Dome. Another, of course, is that his religion naturally rules him out from a Constitution where all religions are equal. Another is that, because he does not think that teetotalism should be a part of the Constitution, any more than vegetarianism or wearing woollen underclothing, he must be a wild pagan Bacchus reeling in an eternal delirium of intoxication. All this is very pleasing; but what pleases me most about it is wondering whether all these charges and denunciations will now be transferred to Nicholas Murray Butler.

Merely as an agreeable train of fancy, I like to speculate on whether the eminent scholar will also become a guttersnipe. Will Professor Murray Butler be a little boy selling newspapers? Will the President of Columbia University be found to be a ruffianly old Boss of Tammany Hall? Will that grave academic figure be a wild drunkard reeling from saloon to saloon? Will he be a fantastic embodiment of all that is illiterate and squalid and grimy from the gutter? Though I have read Mark Twain's account of the charges hurled at an ordinary gentleman who is "Running for Governor," I cannot but detect in that author certain hints and traces of exaggeration. And I find it difficult to believe that these facile explanations can be offered in the case of the scholar as in the case of the candidate. It seems as if some other counterarguments will have to be brought against the arguments of Mr. Smith and his academic ally; and that they will have to be rather stronger than any that I have yet seen.

For the questions raised really have a point and meaning beyond the immediate question of the American Presidential Election, or even the general question of the politics of America. They involve facts that are forgotten in the

Eastern Hemisphere as well as the Western; and fallacies in which we indulge quite as much as the Americans do.

The suggestion of these Democrats, that even Prohibition would at least be more reasonable if it were a sort of Local Option, raises another question: the universal question of whether it is always wise to be universal. The objection to what is called scientific organization is a strictly scientific objection. It is that no chain is stronger than its weakest link, and merely to lengthen the chain is merely to multiply the chance of the links being weak. Mechanical organization is only the lengthening of chains, which are none the less chains of captivity. This fallacy is quite as likely to weaken Big Business or Business Government in England as in America. It is true that the Western example is in some ways more arresting, because of the enormous size of America. The Federal ideal is that the law of Prohibition should be one united thing throughout the Union. But, in practice, it is bound to be a totally different thing in the different States of the Union. We will assume, if only for the sake of argument, that there is in the State of Maine, let us say, a true tradition and a public opinion which is Puritan in principle. We have all heard tales about statistics of drunkenness, which might suggest that it is not quite so Puritan in practice. But we will agree that there may be in some such place a merely democratic instinct in favour of total abstinence.

In that case the citizens are as dignified and respectable as any tribe of Arabs who have unanimously accepted the veto of Mahomet. Nobody will deny their right to do so. But when, for instance, the Prohibition process is applied to a natural wine-growing country like California, then its agents are not like honest Arabs applying their own religion to their own village. They are like wild and barbarous Arabs invading Italy or France and burning the vineyards or uprooting the vines. They are simply savage Vandals destroying an older, a more dignified, and (as some of us think) a superior civilization by brute numbers and brute force. It is simply a colossal cant and ignorance to test such culture by a chemical analysis directed entirely to the discovery of "alcohol." We might as well identify any sort of drinks by the presence of hydrogen. Whatever we may say for or against Prohibition, there is quite obviously all the difference in the world between a system of saloons, selling rye-whiskey - and regarded by many normal and decent citizens as pretty low haunts - and the other tradition of a healthy land of vineyards, where wine is grown as it is grown over the greater part of the civilised world: where it is as deeply rooted and naturally related to the land as Burgundy is to Burgundy.

But though this problem about State Rights and the Union is naturally most pronounced in the United States, the essence of it exists equally in the United Kingdom. It is absurd, for instance, to impose regulations based, rightly or wrongly,

on the office hours of commercial cities upon a rural world that still remembers the ritual of recurrent refreshment necessary to harvesters or haymakers. There is, again, the spirited attack of the Republican professor on the Republican armament. The two questions present a problem to the progressive reformer or idealist both in England and the United States. The Republican candidate appears to stand in the fullest degree for the reduction of drink and in a relatively small degree for the reduction of armament. The modern type of Puritan reformer generally defies with equal frenzy the God of Wine and the God of War. Here, apparently, he can only war on Bacchus by worshipping Mars; and can only hope to burn down the temple of Mars by sacrificing on the altar of Bacchus. If the Nonconformist Conscience is still what it was, the choice will be a rather distracting dilemma. But, though my conscience cannot strictly be described as a Nonconformist conscience, upon either of these two ethical problems, I do the Nonconformist the justice to believe that he would not really hesitate if things so disproportionate were in serious collision. I believe he would try to prevent the outpouring of blood even at the horrid risk of the outpouring of beer; and that another World War would appear to him an even more awful vision than a gentleman drinking a glass of sherry.

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“THE INNOCENT CONSERVATISM OF YOUTH”

Chesterton, G. K.. For *The Illustrated London News*, 27 October 1928.

One of the old sayings repeated eternally by everybody, and rather especially by those who pride themselves on novelty and originality, is the statement that old people tend to be conservative, and that it is only the young who can really believe in change. And yet this saying seems to me to be rather less than a half-truth - so much less as to be very nearly two-thirds of a lie. My own experience is this: that I was really much more conservative when I was a boy, though I admit that I was too conservative to be even conscious of how conservative I was. I mean that I was conservative in this sense - that I did not really believe that the fashion of this world could pass away. I had certain ideals of reforming it, and to a great extent I have the same ideals still. In so far as they have changed, it is not in the direction of being any more content with the corruption and oppression of the world. I was once what I called a Socialist; I am now what I call a Distributist. But the ideal of simplicity and small property is rather more unlike the existing condition than the ideal of Communism. It would change the world more to turn it into what I want than to turn it into what Mr. Philip Snowden wants. There is less difference than many suppose between the ideal Socialist system, in which the big businesses are run by the State, and the present Capitalist system, in which the State is run by the big businesses. They are much nearer to each other than either is to my own ideal - of breaking up the big businesses into a multitude of small businesses. That would be really a change; but I am still ready for that change, and I see no reason

to doubt that, when I am tottering on crutches at the age of ninety, I shall still be ready for that change. What I was not ready for, in my youth, was something quite real and entirely different. I did not know that the world itself changes, long before we can change it.

Take a commonplace example for convenience. I sympathised then, and I sympathise still, with various claims of Labour which arose especially in connection with the coal-mines and with the railways. I do not think I have weakened in this: if anything, I think I was more doubtful and groping when I was young. But there was one thing that I never really doubted when I was young. And that was that coal would continue to support England and enrich the capitalists of England. I thought of this unique wealth as one of the conditions of the case, which might be attacked in various ways, moderate, greedy, revolutionary, and so on. But I vaguely assumed that the coal would be there, as I assumed that the sea would be there. Yet these things also can change; and even the sea is not quite so significantly and satisfactorily there since the alteration of the relations of ships and aeroplanes. I was accustomed to the two sides of the old argument about whether coal-owners were too rich; I never really looked forward to the new argument that coal-owners are too poor. I was accustomed to the talk of heaping up riches or dividing riches or justly distributing riches; but I had forgotten the old Scriptural figure that the riches themselves take to themselves wings and fly. In a word, I could not imagine change, the real fundamental changes of this earthly life, because I was too conservative, being a boy.

In the same way, I knew all about the grumbling of railway passengers against railway porters, and in the same way about the grumbling of railway porters against railway directors. I sympathised more with the latter than with the former, and I do still. But when I was a boy, which was just before the motorcar burst upon the world, I never dreamed of doubting that the railway-train dominated the whole future of the world. It was the latest great locomotive that man had invented. And that conservative spirit of childhood always makes the child think of the latest as the last. To talk, as some people are now talking, of whether railways will become obsolete, of whether steam can be superseded, of whether railway stock will always be as safe as it was - all this would have been to me a prophecy as unintelligible as some of those Old Testament visions that seem a medley of wheels and wings and clouds. Railways had been firmly established before I was born; I never dreamed of doubting that they would remain exactly the same after I died. They seemed to me simply the iron framework of England, and almost of existence: as if the embankments were built before the everlasting hills or the trains of "Bradshaw" followed their appointed circuit like the stars. If there is any old gentleman still alive who remembers the time when there were no railways, he probably feels quite differently: he feels as I feel about motoring. I do not feel in this cosmic and conservative way about motoring, but I think it probable that the young who are younger than motoring really do. If you talk to them of a future without motoring, of a coming time when petrol will be scarcer than coal and men will walk about on their feet for want of wheels to carry them, it will seem like an

unthinkable nightmare of negation. It will seem what the amputation of all legs would seem to a population of pedestrians. But they also will learn in due course what they cannot conceive now, just as I have learnt in due course what I could not have conceived then: that it is the world that alters, even more than we who alter it.

Of course, it is a comparatively slow alteration, which to some muddle-headed evolutionists seems to make it more consoling, but in fact makes it much more dangerous. It may or may not be true that petrol will replace coal or cars replace railways. But nobody supposes that Waterloo Station fell in a heap of ruins when the first taxicab went across Waterloo Bridge, or that bats and owls nested in Clapham Junction when the first petrol-pump was set up on the road to Clapham Common. The point is not whether the changes are as rapid and revolutionary as the young are supposed generally to expect. The point is that they are not the changes they were expecting. Above all, the point is that they are changes in the very material they propose to treat - not changes in the manner of treating it. It is not a question of a younger generation wishing to carve the Phrygian cap or the Tree of Liberty on a stone that has been marked out for decoration with the Crown or the Cross. It is a question of the stone crumbling away before it can be carved with anything, because they have forgotten the air they breathe, and the sky and the weather of the world.

We are always being told nowadays to allow for the natural impulses and instincts of youth. Let us be careful to allow for this most profound instinct of youth, its innocent conservatism. Let us always remember that to the very young the world they see really seems to be eternal; and that, however much they may talk a current cant about novelty and mutability, they do not really expect the externals of their world to be profoundly altered by time. Notice, for instance, what is the very phrase used in defence of any novelty. Observe what is really said in praise of the electric toothpick or the petrol pea-shooter. We are always assured that the discovery "has come to stay." We, who have lived long enough to understand the real value of life, know perfectly well that nothing of that sort has ever come to stay. It may do all sorts of other things; but there is one thing that it cannot do, and that is to stay. We shall show no irritation, please God, on being repeatedly introduced to the Hat of the Future and the Umbrella of the New Age and the Goloshes of the Good Time Coming. But the only thing we really have learnt from life is that the good time will be going as well as coming, and that, in the book of fashions, the Hat of the Future will be recorded as the Hat of the Past. It is now the custom to condemn youth as too frivolous. But youth is always too serious; and just now it is too serious about frivolity. The conservatism of youth is a good thing; and it is not even necessary to conserve it.

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“ON THE AMERICAN ELECTION, AGAIN”

Chesterton, G. K.. For *The Illustrated London News*, 10 November 1928.

It is well known that I am an unreasonable reactionary, who refuses to face the great facts of the modern world. I have never been convinced that a giraffe is a better fireside playmate than a kitten. I cannot be got to see that a hippopotamus is certain to win a race against a greyhound. An invincible prejudice prevents me from admitting that whales served on toast are more appetising than sardines. Nay, I cannot even persuade myself that the larger sort of sharks are, as drawing-room ornaments, necessarily improvements upon goldfish. I cannot think that the gesture of pulling up a palm-tree is always easier or more graceful than that of picking a flower; or that it is always more enjoyable to die of thirst in the Sahara than to drink wine from a small vineyard or water from a village well. In short, I am lamentably lacking in that reverence for largeness, or for things on a Big Scale, which is apparently the religion of the age of Big Business. And, among other instances, I may venture to point out that this difference of opinion applies particularly to what was in the first instance, I suppose, the home and source of Big Business. There are a great many things which I really do admire about America; which I admire with much more sincerity than is common in those who merely flatter America. I admire America for being simple, for not being snobbish, for being still democratic in instincts, for having a respect for work and for treating the mere luxurious cynic as a lounge-lizard. But I do not admire America for being big. I do not envy America for being big. I do not even feel that it has practical and material advantages in being big. But it has a great many very big disadvantages from being big; and one of them emerges in the intensely interesting issue of the American Presidential Election.

There is no nation more active than the Americans, none more naturally intelligent, none more easy to move for the purpose of starting a campaign, or spreading an idea. But it is obvious that the field of operations is too large even for the largest campaign. The idea cannot be spread, even spread very thin, over quite so vast a surface. It is therefore a fact, quite as familiar to enlightened Americans as to anybody else, that there are great masses of unenlightened Americans, whom none of the enlightened Americans can approach near enough to enlighten. There are superstitions that might have stagnated for centuries in an impenetrable swamp; there are wild religions that might have sprung up and died in a desert; there are solid blocks of barbarous ignorance which were due not to stupidity but simply to segregation. There is no particular occasion for superiority or self-righteousness about this. If all Europe were one nation, we should doubtless be saying the same about certain black belts among the Tartars or the Slavs. But though England has not yet the luck to be a small nationality, thank heaven it is not quite in that degree a great power. For, in this aspect, there is no such thing as a great power. What is spread out before us is a great weakness. The system in extending its communications always decreases its efficiency; and there never was an empire upon this earth that did not go further and fare worse.

Anyhow, this queer fact of psychology and sociology has been illustrated amazingly in the outcry against Governor Smith. Such cries seem sometimes to be hardly human; and nothing like them has been heard in Europe since the rabble roared behind Titus Oates or the native Irish were driven to Hell or Connaught. But there is one peculiarity of the ignorance to which I would draw special attention, though it is probably not the one to which I am supposed chiefly to attend. I am a Catholic, but I know quite well that there are Anti-Catholics and Anti-Catholics. The extraordinary thing about these people is not that they know nothing about the Church, but that they know nothing about the world. It is not that they are ignorant of the old religion, but that they are ignorant of the modern situation, and of the things that are not only specially modern, but rather specially American. America is too large to understand its own largeness. It is not that thousands of them do not know what is meant by a Papal Bull. It is rather as if thousands of them did not know what is meant by a Ford Car.

For instance, one thing that seems to have been said over and over again is that Mr. Smith would “bring the Pope over,” and apparently keep him permanently in the White House at Washington; whether as a paying guest or a sort of private chaplain I cannot quite make out. It is unnecessary to point out here (though it might be quite necessary to point out there) that the Pope is the very last person about whom such fears need be entertained. There is nothing particular to prevent the President of the Soviet Republic or the Dictator of the Italian Fascists from coming to Washington. There is a positive policy and regulation to prevent the Pope from going out of Rome. But it is not this obvious parenthesis that interests me. What interests me is this: that the very idea suggested is a simple and primitive and barbaric idea; the idea of somebody who is quite outside the modern civilised world. If we express a fear that Picasso may have too much influence on English art, we do not mean that somebody will bring him over and put him into lodgings in Chelsea. When we say that Mr. Rockefeller might threaten the English interests in oil, we do not mean that Mr. Rockefeller must be living quietly near Clapham Junction, disguised as a clerk. The influence of Mussolini, the influence of Lenin, does not mean the danger of people carrying them about like luggage to different ports and custom houses. For good or evil, and indeed very largely for evil, the international influences of the modern world do not depend on particular people going to particular places. The point is that nobody would suggest it but somebody ignorant of the modern world.

All genuine admirers of America, including all genuine Americans, will see in these symptoms a conflict of very high significance. The election is not a conflict between Democrats and Republicans, or between Drink and Prohibition, or even in the first place between Agriculture and Finance. It is, in the simplest sense of the very strongest phrase, a conflict between light and darkness; between things understood and things not understood; between people who take a certain view of the facts, and people who have never yet even heard of the facts; between principle and prejudice; between cosmos and chaos. I am well aware that Mr. Hoover himself and many high-minded

Republicans altogether repudiate this bigotry and barbarism; but they cannot help the unfortunate fact that it is the strongest thing on their side. It may be that they would not use it; but it will have no such delicacy about using them. And, as a matter of calculating the actual practical proportions of things, this is the thing that will defeat Mr. Smith if he is defeated; this is the thing he will have to defeat to avoid being defeated. We should not think that a serious political issue about Protection for Hops was being adequately settled if for large sections of the electorate it turned entirely on the proposition that Kentish men have tails. It is not a serious political issue about Prohibition or anything else, when for large sections of the electorate it turns on a general impression that American Catholics have horns. We should not think the problem of Imperialism adequately solved by the simple-minded few who once imagined that the Boers were black. Unfortunately in America there are people equally simple-minded, and not quite so few, who suppose that the Irish, when attached to their national religion, are all morally and spiritually black. That sort of problem has nothing to do with preference for any such race or religion; it is simply a question of whether the issue shall be decided by a delusion. A fanatical secret society of this sort existed in America before, and was called the "Know Nothing" movement. The title was truer than it was meant to be. And the struggle is simply between those who know something, right or wrong, and the enormous natural strength of those who know nothing.

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"LINCOLN, IN MYTH AND REALITY"

Chesterton, G. K.. For *The Illustrated London News*, 17 November 1928.

A new and important book seems to have appeared, on the permanently interesting subject of Abraham Lincoln. Unlike many other reviewers, I will confess frankly to having only read of it in a review. But the review was by Mr. John Drinkwater, who has some right to consider the subject as his own; and I am here more concerned with the review than with the book, and more concerned with the subject than with the review. Both biographer and reviewer have some very valuable things to say about the more realistic view of Lincoln, and certain aspects of his life, especially his early life, which are not those emphasised by the merely sentimental admirer. Mr. Drinkwater recognises that Lincoln emerged from the lower grades of law and politics through an atmosphere in which the lowest tricks were regarded as only tricks of the trade. That queer, shabby figure, the "railsplitter," with his stove-pipe hat and clumsy cotton umbrella, did undoubtedly emerge among such tricksters as being by far the most truthful. But in the world where he began he could only have been called the least tricky. It is to his credit that he shed most of these habits with a natural shame, and for no other reason. But it is clear that, at some periods, it was not only his hat and umbrella that were shabby.

But there is another paradox about Abraham Lincoln, over and above those noticed by the two writers in question, and one that has always seemed to me very noticeable. He really was a hero, but he seems exactly the wrong sort of hero for all his own hero-worshippers. We should be rather surprised if a very quiet and pacific colony of Quakers in a Pennsylvanian village had no other interest in life but the glorification of the great Napoleon, the exultant and detailed description of his battles, the lyrical salute of the cannonade of Austerlitz or the cavalry charges of Wagram. We should think it odd if a company of pagan epicureans, crowned with roses and flushed with wine, had no other thought in the world but a devotion to St. Simeon Stylites, for his austerity and asceticism in standing on a pillar in the desert. It would seem curious if the young Swinburne had been the only idol of the Nonconformist Conscience, or if the Prussian militarists had thought of nothing but the Christian Socialism of Tolstoy. And yet the sort of people who incessantly sing the praises of Abraham Lincoln have got hold of a man quite as incongruous to their own conceptions of a hero - if ever they could turn from imagining the hero to considering the man. The sort of people who are called Puritans perpetually glorify a man who seems to have been in his youth a rather crude sort of atheist, and was famous all his life for telling dirty or profane stories. The sort of people who are generally Prohibitionists invariably invoke the name of a man who said that habitual drunkards compared favourably with most other people of his acquaintance; and who would himself, in moments of relaxation, tip up a barrel of whisky and drink the liquor through the bunghole. The sort of people who are perpetually talking about punctuality and propriety, and the prompt performance of duty or seizure of opportunity, are always commending to us the example of a man who never turned up at his own wedding, and who made a most horrible mess of his own domestic affairs. Yes, he was a hero all right; but his hero-worshippers would not think so.

But perhaps the most curious part of the contradiction is this. Americans of his own Yankee and Puritan following are always talking about Success. Worse still, they are always talking about men who are Bound To Succeed. It seems possible that the men Bound to Succeed were those afterwards shortened into Bounders. Certainly the portraits and descriptions of such beings richly suggest the briefer description. But Lincoln was not a Bounder. Lincoln was most certainly not a man Bound To Succeed. For the greater part of his life, he looked much more like a man Bound To Fail. Indeed, for that matter, a great many of his cold and uncomprehending colleagues, right up to the very end of the Civil War, thought he really was a man bound to fail. The truth is that he was a very clear and even beautiful example of the operation of the opposite principle - that God has chosen the failures of the world to confound the successes; and the true moral of his life is that of the poets and the saints. He was one of a very rare and very valuable race, whose representatives

appear from time to time in history. He was one of the Failures who happen to succeed.

What I mean is this: that, if ninety-nine out of a hundred of the people who specially praise Lincoln to-day had met him at almost any time of his life till within a few years of his death they would have avoided him as they avoid the drunkard, the lunatic, the impecunious poet, the habitual criminal, and the man who is always borrowing money. This, of course, is even more true of General Grant than of President Lincoln; and it is a queer irony that the great Puritan and commercial power of the North should have been saved entirely by two such men. But, though Lincoln was never a habitual drunkard like Grant, he had about him in all his early days the same savour of unsuccess. The philanthropists and social reformers who now worship his name would have regarded him as belonging to the type which they think "unemployable"; a scallywag, a drifter and dreamer, a man who would come to no good. His casualness, his coarseness, his habit of taking up this and that and not making it pay, his changes of trade and dwelling-place, all these would have sufficed to make him seem from the first fated to failure. But, whatever his weaknesses or even his vices, they would not have been so fatal to his chances as his own supreme virtue. The one great virtue of Abraham Lincoln would have seemed alone sufficient to cut him off from all hope of success in modern civilization.

For this great man had one secret vice far more unpopular among his followers than the habit of drinking. He had the habit of thinking. We might almost call it the habit of secret thinking, a dark consolation like that of secret drinking; for during his early days he must have practiced it unappreciated, and it has been said that he worked out the propositions of Euclid as a relief after having been nagged by his wife. This habit of thinking was not the thoughtless thing commonly called free-thinking, though he may have picked up a little of that in his less enlightened days. It was real thinking, which means knowing exactly where to draw the line - a logic which is often mistaken for compromise.

The great glory of Lincoln is that, almost alone among politicians, he really knew what he thought about politics. He really thought slavery was bad, but he really thought the disruption of America was worse. It is perfectly possible for an intelligent person to disagree with him on either or both of these points. But he was an intelligent person when he stated them in that way, and put them in that order. In short, he had a native love of Truth; and, like every man with such a love, he had a natural hatred of mere Tendency. He had no use for progress, for evolution, for going with the stream, for letting the spirit of the age lead him onward. He knew exactly what he thought, not only about the perfection, but the proportion of truth; not only about the direction, but the distance. He was not always right but he always

tried to be reasonable, and that in exactly the sense which his special admirers have never understood from that day to this. He tried to be reasonable. It is not surprising that his life was a martyrdom and that he died murdered.