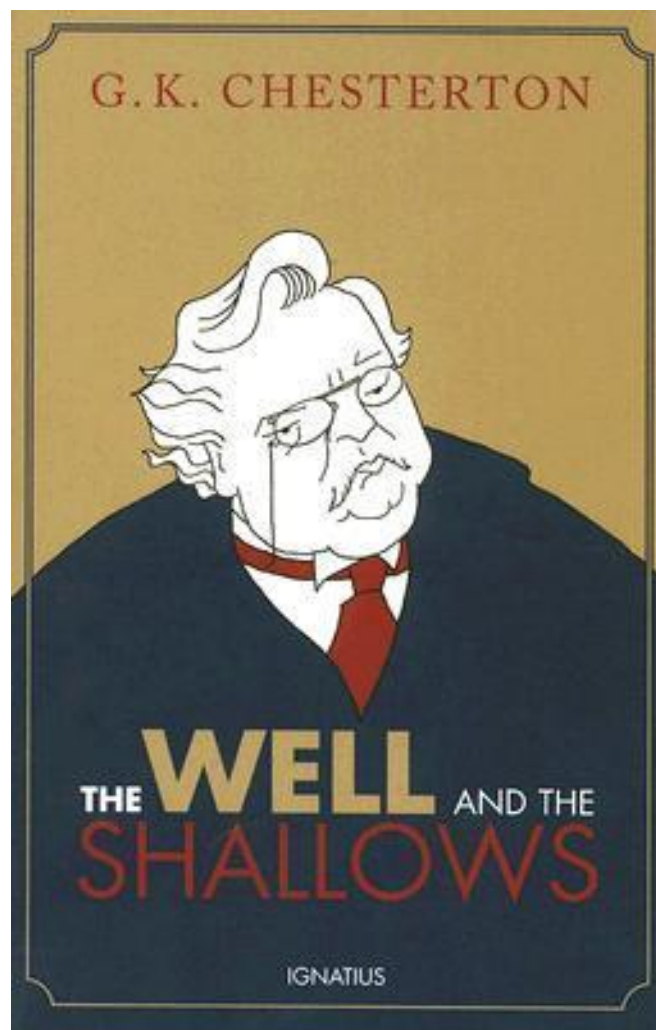


APRIL 2016

# SOUTHEAST PA CHESTERTON SOCIETY READING PACKET

*EXCERPTS FROM:*



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## MY SIX CONVERSIONS

### *I. THE RELIGION OF FOSSILS.*

AT least six times during the last few years, I have found myself in a situation in which I should certainly have become a Catholic, if I had not been restrained from that rash step by the fortunate accident that I was one already. The point is not merely personal but has some representative interest, because our critics constantly expect the convert to suffer some sort of reaction, ending in disappointment and perhaps desertion. As a rule, the most that they will concede to us is that we have found peace by the surrender of reason; which generally means in practice that we pass the rest of our lives in interminable controversies with a perpetual appeal to logic. But, as a fact, it is in a rather peculiar sense, the other way about. The strongest sort of confirmation often comes to the convert after he has received enough to establish conviction. In these articles I propose to discuss some examples of this singular sort of post-conversion conversion. I mean that things have happened, since I was received into the Church, which would in any case have rendered impossible any intellectual position outside the Church, and especially the position in which I originally found myself. One occasion was the Parliamentary settlement of the controversy on the Prayer-Book—or Prayer-Books. Another was the Lambeth decision, or indecision, about Birth-Control. But I will take first the example of the latest turn of political events in Europe. I take it first because it is both typical and topical; that is, it gives perhaps the clearest and simplest example of the sort of thing I mean, and it is a thing of which the facts are fresh and familiar to everybody, even those who live only from day to day with the assistance of the daily Press; that very synthetic substitute for daily bread. But in order to explain what I think has really happened, rather more lucidly than the daily Press explains it, it is necessary to say a preliminary word about the Protestant Reformation and the sense in which its consequences, rather than itself, continue to bewilder and mislead Christendom.

Men of the type or school of Bishop Barnes or Dean Inge are, as we know, very fond of appealing to the discoveries of science; generally the not very recent discoveries of nineteenth-century science. They delight in dealing with what my grandfather would have called the Testimony of the Rocks; the geological record of natural development; and they often treat fossils and similar traces as if they were sacred hieroglyphics, by which some priesthood had symbolised the secret of the universe. And yet it is doubtful, it is more than doubtful, whether one of the Broad Church ecclesiastics would be soothed and flattered if I addressed him personally as an Old Fossil. Nor indeed should I dream of indulging in this playful form of social address; since there are truths, or half-truths, that cannot be coarsely stated without giving rise to misunderstanding even about their true meaning.

In one sense these liberal theologians are interested in fossils. They continue to demonstrate the Darwinian theory from the geological record, by means of all the fossils that ought to be found in it. They will even explain luminously why the geological evidence does not apparently exist; and they seem to think that this is quite as convincing as if it did exist. But I doubt whether they have really thought profoundly and delicately about what a fossil is, or there would be no danger of their resenting so innocent and inoffensive a comparison. For a fossil is really a very curious thing. A fossil is not a dead animal, or a decayed organism, or in essence even an antiquated object. The whole point of a fossil is that it is the form of an animal or organism, from which all its own animal or organic substance has entirely disappeared; but which has kept its shape, because it has been filled up by some totally different substance by some process of distillation or secretion, so that we might

almost say, as in the medieval metaphysics, that its substance has vanished and only its accidents remain. And that is perhaps the very nearest figure of speech we can find for the truth about the New Religions, which were started only three or four hundred years ago. They are Fossils.

It is easy to see the sense in which they are now dying. But in a much deeper sense, they have long been dead. The extraordinary thing about them was that they really died almost as soon as they were born. And this was due to a fact not always emphasised, but which always strikes me as the most outstanding fact of the mysterious business; the incredible clumsiness of the Reformers. The real Protestant theologians were such very bad theologians. They had an amazing opportunity; the old Church had been swept out of their way, along with many things that were really unpopular, and some things that were deservedly unpopular. One would suppose it was easy enough to set up something that would at least look a little more popular. When they tried to do it, they made every mistake that they could make. They waged an insane war against everything in the old faith that is most normal and sympathetic to human nature; such as prayers for the dead or the gracious image of a Mother of Men. They hardened and fixed themselves upon fads which anybody could see would pass like fashions. Luther lashed himself into a sort of general fury, which obviously could not last; Calvin was logical, but used his logic for a scheme which humanity manifestly would not long find enduring. Perhaps the most successful were those who really had no ideas to offer at all; like the founders of the Anglican Church. They at least did not exasperate human nature; but even they showed the same blindness, in binding themselves instantly to the Divine Right of Kings, which was almost immediately to break down.

For this reason, there is really no historical doubt about what Protestantism did; it died. It did not die because the Protestants were wrong; Mahomet, for instance, was a far shrewder person, and his heresy has not died. The creed of the Protestants died, not because they were wrong, but because they were wrong-headed. They did not really think what they were doing; and this was chiefly because the real driving force behind them was the impatient insolence and avarice of new nobles and rebellious princes. But, anyhow, the theological and theoretical part of their work withered with extraordinary rapidity; and the void that was left was almost as rapidly filled with other things. What those things were is clear enough in many cases, including cases much more apparently harmless; but it is clearest of all in what is confronting us to-day; the Race Religion of the Germans.

Needless to say, there was no such nonsense talked in Luther's time, or for long after his time; and, least of all, to do him justice, by Luther. Germans were turbulent and a little barbaric, as he was himself; but it is only fair to him to say that he was a Christian, in the sense that he believed that nothing could be done except in the strength of Christ. A superbly typical story reaches me from Germany; that some of the Nazis started out to sing the great reformer's famous hymn, "A strong fortress is our God" (which sounds quite promisingly militaristic), but found themselves unable to articulate the very words at the beginning of the next verse, which ran, "Of ourselves we can do nothing." Luther did, in his own mad way, believe in humility; but modern Germany believes simply, solely and entirely in pride. That is an example of what I mean by a void being filled up, not only by another substance, but actually by an antagonistic substance.

Luther was subject to irrational convulsions of rage, in one of which he tore out the Epistle of St. James from the Bible, because St. James exalts the importance of good works. But I shudder to imagine into what sort of epileptic convulsion he would have fallen if anybody had told him to tear out the Epistles of St. Paul, because St. Paul was not an Aryan. Luther, if possible, rather exaggerated the weakness of humanity, but at least it was the weakness of all humanity. John Knox

achieved that queer Puritan paradox, of combining the same concentrated invocation of Christ with an inhuman horror and loathing for all the signs and forms and traditions generally characteristic of Christians. He combined, in the way that puzzles us so much, the adoration of the Cross with the abomination of the Crucifix. But at least John Knox would have exploded like dynamite, if anybody had asked him to adore the Swastika. All this new Nordic nonsense would seem to have nothing whatever to do with Protestant theology; or rather to be completely contrary to it. No one is more sincerely glad than we are to know that some of the German Protestants are still most consistent and courageous Christians; and that a definite number of the Lutherans still have some sort of remote connection with Luther. But, taking the development simply as an historical development, as a part of the science and philosophy of history, it is obvious by this time that the hollow places that were once tilled with the foaming fanaticism of the first Reformation doctrines are now filled with a foaming fanaticism of a totally different kind. Those who are rebelling like Luther are rebelling against Luther.

The main moral of this is so large and simple and striking, that it will soon be impossible to conceal it from the world. It is the simple fact that the moment men began to contradict the Church with their own private judgment, everything they did was incredibly ill-judged; that those who broke away from the Church's basis almost immediately broke down on their own basis; that those who tried to stand apart from Authority could not in fact stand at all. Islam stood by being stagnant; it is not unfair to say it stood up by lying down. But Protestantism could not stand in the staggering rush of the West; it could only maintain itself by ceasing to be itself, and announcing its readiness to turn into anything else.

## ***II. WHEN THE WORLD TURNED BACK.***

**FOR** the first forty years of my life, practically no man in the world, and certainly no man of the world, had any doubt whatever about what Matthew Arnold called, "the way the world is going." A man did not necessarily agree with Matthew Arnold, who seemed to think that he must necessarily go the way the world was going. Some regretted ages that were gone; some again were prepared to go farther than others, some to go faster than others; some almost passionately desired to go slow. But all agreed that it was, in the vulgar phrase, going it; and still going strong. It was, very broadly, the demand for freedom and fraternity flowing from the French Revolution and the American Revolution, making towards an ideal of democracy. Elements were indeed mixed in it, which logically had very little to do with each other. There was a tendency to materialism, to monism or to scepticism, which I rejected long before I was a Catholic. There was an element of equal justice, and the dignity of all citizens, which I accepted long after I was a Catholic; and which I accept still. But I assumed, like everybody else, that the main movement was still moving; and would presumably go on moving. There were three ways in which it could be recognised by a Catholic, or a man of increasingly Catholic sympathies, (1) He could say that this was the way the world was going; and so much the worse for the world. He could say the world would certainly go further and fare worse. (2) He could say, with considerable truth, that no such movement that was purely secular really touched the question that was purely spiritual. To take a simple example, the most ideal Republicans could not somehow get out of the human habit of dying; and generally of wondering whether dying meant being completely dead. Democracy could not satisfy all desires, even if it could purge itself enough to satisfy all democratic desires. (3) He could look forward, with some historical justification, to a time when any temporal quarrel between the Church and the Republic should end in a real and reasonable reconciliation of the truths in both; as St. Thomas

reconciled the philosophy of Aristotle with the religion of Augustine. Something like this has largely been done, in recent Papal pronouncements; but the point is here that whether or no the Church could close this particular quarrel with the world, everyone was certain that a quarrel with democracy was a quarrel with the world. In short, a Catholic might reject the present progress; or say his creed was independent of the present progress; or say his creed would find a place for the present progress. But everybody believed that the progress of the present would be the progress of the future.

Then came the astounding judgments; the strange signs of Apocalypse. First the Great War; then the paradox of Fascism in Italy; then the parody of Fascism in Germany. Now these things have left in the minds of all thinking men (as the Rationalist Press Association would say) an enormous overturn or reversal of thought, which has nothing whatever to do with thinking any of these movements right or wrong. It is very vital to realise that the change is something more fundamental than agreement or disagreement with the factions concerned. A man may think the war waged by the Allies justifiable, as I did and do; he may think that the stroke of Mussolini had considerable justification, or even that the stroke of Hitler achieved many things that were just. Or he may think exactly the opposite, and regard the whole militant epoch as a relapse into blood and barbarism, from the first recruit of Kitchener's Army to the last ruffian dripping with the blood of Dollfuss. But there is a changed landscape at the back of all these fighting figures; and it is a landscape like an earthquake. What a man knows, now, is that the whole march of mankind can turn and tramp backwards in its tracks; that progress can start progressing, or feeling as if it were progressing, in precisely the contrary course from that which has been called progress for centuries. It can not only lose but fling away all that its fathers fought for and valued most; it can not only restore but restore exclusively all that its grandfathers were forced to abandon, or felt themselves unable to defend. The whole world is moving again; but it is moving the other way.

To-day this is the way the world is going, if there is any such thing. But in fact there is no such thing. A Catholic perhaps should have seen it from the first; but many a Catholic has only seen it in a flash at the last. There is no way the world is going. There never was. The world is not going anywhere, in the sense of the old optimist progressives, or even of the old pessimist reactionaries. It is not going to the Brave New World which Mr. Aldous Huxley described with detestation, any more than to the New Utopia which Mr. H. G. Wells described with delight. The world is what the saints and the prophets saw it was; it is not merely getting better or merely getting worse; there is one thing that the world does; it wobbles. Left to itself, it does not get anywhere; though if helped by real reformers of the right religion and philosophy, it may get better in many respects, and sometimes for considerable periods. But in itself it is not a progress; it is not even a process; it is the fashion of this world that passeth away. Life in itself is not a ladder; it is a see-saw.

Now that is fundamentally what the Church has always said; and for about four hundred years has been more and more despised for saying. The Church never said that wrongs could not or should not be righted; or that commonwealths could not or should not be made happier; or that it was not worth while to help them in secular and material things; or that it is not a good thing if manners become milder, or comforts more common, or cruelties more rare. But she did say that we must not count on the certainty even of comforts becoming more common or cruelties more rare; as if this were an inevitable social trend towards a sinless humanity; instead of being as it was a mood of man, and perhaps a better mood, possibly to be followed by a worse one. We must not hate humanity, or despise humanity, or refuse to help humanity; but we must not trust humanity; in the sense of trusting a trend in human nature which cannot turn back to bad things. "Put not your trust

in princes; nor in any child of man." That is the precise point of this very practical sort of politics. Be a Royalist if you like (and there is a vast amount to be said, and a vast amount being said, just now, for more personal and responsible rule); try a Monarchy if you think it will be better; but do not trust a Monarchy, in the sense of expecting that a monarch will be anything but a man. Be a Democrat if you like (and I shall always think it the most generous and the most fundamentally Christian ideal in politics); express your sense of human dignity in manhood suffrage or any other form of equality; but put not your trust in manhood suffrage or in any child of man. There is one little defect about Man, the image of God, the wonder of the world and the paragon of animals; that he is not to be trusted. If you identify him with some ideal, which you choose to think is his inmost nature or his only goal, the day will come when he will suddenly seem to you a traitor.

He seems a traitor to-day to all that world of liberal and enlightened opinion, which had made up its mind about the way the world was going, in the path of progress and of peace; the world of Wells and Webb and the Pacifists of America and the social reformers of Cambridge. Most of them are reduced to muttering, like the villain in the old melodrama, "a time will come." But it is in a very different tone from that in which they were crying quite lately, like the man in the comic song, "Now we shan't be long!" The most hopeful of them admit that we shall probably be very long, in reversing all that the reaction in Europe has done already. If, that is, it is ever reversed; and these people really have nothing except a purely mystical faith to suggest that it ever will be reversed. I am really more hopeful in being what they would call more hopeless; for I suspect that pretty nearly everything is eventually reversed. But it was exactly because they would not see this, that they were startled when their own reform or revolution was reversed before their own eyes. The point here, however, is that if there is something stable and not subject to reversal, it is not like anything that they imagine. Its habitation is not in the future or necessarily in any development of ideas peculiar to the present; we are not at the beginning of any endless and expanding dawn, but only of the ordinary daily dawns each followed by its own darkness; and the Faith, as Mr. Belloc said, "is the only beacon in this night, if beacon there be."

In the heart of Christendom, in the head of the Church, in the centre of the civilisation called Catholic, there and in no movement and in no future, is found that crystallisation of commonsense and true traditions and rational reforms, for which the modern man mistakenly looked to the whole trend of the modern age. From this will come the reminders that mercy is being neglected or memory cast away, and not from the men who happen to make the next batch of rulers on this restless and distracted earth. That is the fact that we have all found at last; and that is why I have put it first. It is not the first in order, but it is the first in importance, of the facts I have discovered after I had discovered the truth; and if I had still been out in the darkness, it would in this dark hour have brought me to the door.

### ***III. THE SURRENDER UPON SEX.***

**I HAVE** explained that these are sketches of six separate occasions, on which I should have become a Catholic, if I had not been the one and only kind of human being who cannot become a Catholic. The excitement of conversion is still open to the atheist and the diabolist; and everybody can be converted except the convert. In my first outline, I mentioned that one of the crises, which would in any case have driven me the way I had gone already, was the shilly-shallying and sham liberality of the famous Lambeth Report on what is quaintly called Birth Control. It is in fact, of course, a scheme for preventing birth in order to escape control. But this particular case was only the

culmination of a long process of compromise and cowardice about the problem of sex; the final surrender after a continuous retreat.

There is one historical human fact which now seems to me so plain and solid, that I think that even if I were to lose the Faith, I could not lose sight of the fact. It has rather the character of a fact of chemistry or geology; though from another side it is mysterious enough, like many other manifest and unmistakable facts. It is this: that at the moment when Religion lost touch with Rome, it changed instantly and internally, from top to bottom, in its very substance and the stuff of which it was made. It changed in substance; it did not necessarily change in form or features or externals. It might do the same things; but it could not be the same thing. It might go on saying the same things; but it was not the same thing that was saying them. At the very beginning, indeed, the situation was almost exactly like that. Henry VIII was a Catholic in everything except that he was not a Catholic. He observed everything down to the last bead and candle; he accepted everything down to the last deduction from a definition; he accepted everything except Rome. And in that instant of refusal, his religion became a different religion; a different sort of religion; a different sort of thing. In that instant it began to change; and it has not stopped changing yet. We are all somewhat wearily aware that some Modern Churchmen call such continuous change progress; as when we remark that a corpse crawling with worms has an increased vitality; or that a snow-man, slowly turning into a puddle, is purifying itself of its accretions. But I am not concerned with this argument here. The point is that a dead man may look like a sleeping man a moment after he is dead; but decomposition has actually begun. The point is that the snow-man may in theory be made in the real image of man. Michelangelo made a statue in snow; and it might quite easily have been an exact replica of one of his statues in marble; but it was not in marble. Most probably the snow-man has begun to melt almost as soon as it is made. But even if the frost holds, it is still a stuff capable of melting when the frost goes. It seemed to many that Protestantism would long continue to be, in the popular phrase, a perfect frost. But that does not alter the difference between ice and marble; and marble does not melt.

The same sort of progressives are always telling us to have a trust in the Future. As a fact, the one thing that a progressive cannot possibly have is a trust in the Future. He cannot have a trust in his own Future; let alone in his own Futurism. If he sets no limit to change, it may change all his own progressive views as much as his conservative views. It was so with the Church first founded by Henry VIII; who was, in almost everything commonly cursed as Popery, rather more Popish than the Pope. He thought he might trust it to go on being orthodox; to go on being sacramentalist; to go on being sacerdotalist; to go on being ritualist, and the rest. There was only one little weakness. It could not trust itself to go on being itself. Nothing else, except the Faith, can trust itself to go on being itself.

Now touching this truth in relation to Sex, I may be permitted to introduce a trivial journalistic anecdote. A few years before the War, some of my fellow-journalists, Socialists as well as Tories, were questioning me about what I really meant by Democracy; and especially if I really thought there was anything in Rousseau's idea of the General Will. I said I thought (and I think I still think) that there can be such a thing, but it must be much more solid and unanimous than a mere majority, such as rules in party politics. I applied the old phrase of the Man in the Street, by saying that if I looked out of the window at a strange man walking past my house, I could bet heavily on his thinking some things, but not the common controversial things The Liberals might have a huge majority, but he need not be a Liberal; statistics might prove England to be preponderantly Conservative, but I would not bet a button that he would be Conservative. But (I



said) I should bet that he believes in wearing clothes. And my Socialist questioners did not question this; they, too, accepted clothes as so universal an agreement of common sense and civilisation, that we might attribute the tradition to a total stranger, unless he were a lunatic. Such a little while ago! To-day, when I see the stranger walking down the street, I should not bet that he believes even in clothes. The country is dotted with Nudist Colonies; the bookstalls are littered with Nudist magazines; the papers swarm with polite little paragraphs, praising the brownness and braveness of the special sort of anarchical asses here in question. At any given moment, there may be a General Will; but it is an uncommonly weak and wavering sort of will, without the Faith to support it.

As in that one matter of modesty, or the mere externals of sex, so in all the deeper matters of sex, the modern will has been amazingly weak and wavering. And I suppose it is because the Church has known from the first this weakness which we have all discovered at last, that about certain sexual matters She has been very decisive and dogmatic; as many good people have quite honestly thought, too decisive and dogmatic. Now a Catholic is a person who has plucked up courage to face the incredible and inconceivable idea that something else may be wiser than he is. And the most striking and outstanding illustration is perhaps to be found in the Catholic view of marriage as compared with the modern theory of divorce; not, it must be noted, the very modern theory of divorce, which is the mere negation of marriage; but even more the slightly less modern and more moderate theory of divorce, which was generally accepted even when I was a boy. This is the very vital point or test of the question; for it explains the Church's rejection of the moderate as well as the immoderate theory. It illustrates the very fact I am pointing out, that Divorce has already turned into something totally different from what was intended, even by those who first proposed it. Already we must think ourselves back into a different world of thought, in order to understand how anybody ever thought it was compatible with Victorian virtue; and many very virtuous Victorians did. But they only tolerated this social solution as an exception; and many other modern social solutions they would not have tolerated at all. My own parents were not even orthodox Puritans or High Church people; they were Universalists more akin to Unitarians. But they would have regarded Birth-Prevention exactly as they would have regarded Infanticide. Yet about Divorce such liberal Protestants did hold an intermediate view, which was substantially this. They thought the normal necessity and duty of all married people was to remain faithful to their marriage; that this could be demanded of them, like common honesty or any other virtue. But they thought that in some very extreme and extraordinary cases a divorce was allowable. Now, putting aside our own mystical and sacramental doctrine, this was not, on the face of it, an unreasonable position. It certainly was not meant to be an anarchical position. But the Catholic Church, standing almost alone, declared that it would in fact lead to an anarchical position; and the Catholic Church was right.

Any man with eyes in his head, whatever the ideas in his head, who looks at the world as it is to-day, must know that the whole social substance of marriage has changed; just as the whole social substance of Christianity changed with the divorce of Henry VIII. As in the other case, the externals remained for a time and some of them remain still. Some divorced persons, who can be married quite legally by a registrar, go on complaining bitterly that they cannot be married by a priest. They regard a church as a peculiarly suitable place in which to make and break the same vow at the same moment. And the Bishop of London, who was supposed to sympathise with the more sacramental party, recently submitted to such a demand on the ground that it was a very special case. As if every human being's case were not a special case. That decision was one of the occasions on which I should have done a bolt, if I had delayed it so long. But the general social atmosphere is much the most important matter. Numbers of normal people are getting married, thinking already

that they may be divorced. The instant that idea enters, the whole conception of the old Protestant compromise vanishes. The sincere and innocent Victorian would never have married a woman reflecting that he could divorce her. He would as soon have married a woman reflecting that he could murder her. These things were not supposed to be among the daydreams of the honeymoon. The psychological substance of the whole thing has altered; the marble has turned to ice; and the ice has melted with most amazing rapidity. The Church was right to refuse even the exception. The world has admitted the exception; and the exception has become the rule.

As I have said, the weak and inconclusive pronouncement upon Birth-Prevention was only the culmination of this long intellectual corruption. I need not discuss the particular problem again at this point; beyond saying that the same truth applies as in the case of Divorce. People propose an easy way out of certain human responsibilities and difficulties; including a way out of the responsibility and difficulty of doing economic justice and achieving better payment for the poor. But these people propose this easy method, in the hope that some people will only use it to a moderate extent; whereas it is much more probable that an indefinite number will use it to an indefinite extent. It is odd that they do not see this; because the writers and thinkers among them are no longer by any means optimistic about human nature, like Rousseau; but much more pessimistic about human nature than we are. Considering mankind as described, for instance, by Mr. Aldous Huxley, it is hard to see what answer he could possibly give, except the answer which we give, if the question were put thus: "On the one side, there is an easy way out of the difficulty by avoiding childbirth: on the other side, there is a very difficult way out of the difficulty, by reconstructing the whole social system and toiling and perhaps fighting for the better system. Which way are the men you describe more likely to take?" But my concern is not with open and direct opponents like Mr. Huxley; but with all to whom I might once have looked to defend the country of the Christian altars. They ought surely to know that the foe now on the frontiers offers no terms of compromise; but threatens a complete destruction. And they have sold the pass.

#### ***IV. THE PRAYER BOOK PROBLEM.***

**ONE** of the events which would have made me a Catholic, if I had not already been a Catholic, was the curious affair of the New Prayer-Book. It revealed to me a reality I had not hitherto realised. There really was a Church of England; or rather there really was an England which largely imagined that it possessed and controlled a Church. But this Church was not the Church I thought I had belonged to; the keen, cultivated and sincere group of men who claimed to be Catholic. It was a much vaster and vaguer background of men; who did not believe in anything in particular, but who claimed to be Protestant. But the vital point was that, whether they claimed to be Protestants or clamorously bragged of being atheists, they all seemed to have this fixed idea; that they owned the Church of England; and could turn it into a Mormon temple if they liked. I could not, in any case, have gone on being owned in that way.

But in order to understand all that was involved, it is necessary to say a word about the Anglican Prayer-Book itself. The Book of Common Prayer is the masterpiece of Protestantism. It is more so than the work of Milton. It is the one positive possession and attraction; the one magnet and talisman for people even outside the Anglican Church, as are the great Gothic cathedrals for people outside the Catholic Church. I can speak, I think, for many other converts, when I say that the only thing that can produce any sort of nostalgia or romantic regret, any shadow of homesickness in one who has in truth come home, is the rhythm of Cranmer's prose. All the other

supposed superiorities of any sort of Protestantism are quite fictitious. Tell a Catholic convert that he has lost his liberty, and he will laugh. A distinguished literary lady wrote recently that I had entered the most restricted of all Christian communions, and I was monstrously amused. A Catholic has fifty times more feeling of being free than a man caught in the net of the nervous compromises of Anglicanism; just as a man considering all England feels more free than a man obeying the Whips of one particular party. He has the range of two thousand years full of twelve-hundred thousand controversies, thrashed out by thinker against thinker, school against school, guild against guild, nation against nation, with no limit except the fundamental logical fact that the things were worth arguing, because they could be ultimately solved and settled. As for Reason, our monopoly is practically admitted in the modern world. Except for one or two dingy old atheists in Fleet Street (for whom I have great sympathy), nothing except Rome now defends the reliability of Reason. Much stronger is the appeal of unreason; or of that beauty which perhaps is beyond reason. The English Litany, the music and the magic of the great sixteenth-century style—that does call a man backwards like the song of the sirens; as Virgil and the poets might have called to a Pagan who had entered the Early Church. Only, being a Romanist and therefore a Rationalist, he does not go back; he naturally does not forget everything else, because his opponents four hundred years ago had a stylistic knack which they have now entirely lost. For the Anglicans cannot do the trick now, any more than anybody else. Modern prayers, and theirs perhaps more than any, seem to be perfectly incapable of avoiding journalese. And the Prayer-Book prose seems to follow them like a derisive echo. Lambeth or Convocation will publish a prayer saying something like, "Guide us, O Lord, to the solution of our social problems"; and the great organ of old will groan in the background. ... "All who are desolate and oppressed." The first Anglicans asked for peace and happiness, truth and justice; but nothing can stop the latest Anglicans, and many others, from the horrid habit of asking for improvement in international relations.

But why has the old Protestant Prayer-Book a power like that of great poetry upon the spirit and the heart? The reason is much deeper than the mere avoidance of journalese. It might be put in a sentence; it has style; it has tradition; it has religion; it was written by apostate Catholics. It is strong, not in so far as it is the first Protestant book, but in so far as it was the last Catholic book. As it happens, this can be proved in the most practical manner from the actual details of the prose. The most moving passages in the old Anglican Prayer-Book are exactly those that are least like the atmosphere of the Anglicans. They are moving, or indeed thrilling, precisely because they say the things which Protestants have long left off saying; and which only Catholics still say. Anybody who knows anything of literature knows when a style lifts itself to its loftiest efforts; and in these cases it is always to say strongly what we still endeavour to say, however weakly; but which nobody else ever endeavours to say at all. Let anyone recall for himself the very finest passages in the Book of Common Prayer, and he will soon see that they are concerned specially with spiritual thoughts and themes that now seem strange and terrible; but anyhow, the reverse of common; "... in the hour of death and in the day of Judgment." Who talks about the hour of death? Who talks about the Day of Judgment? Only a litter of shabby little priests from the Italian Mission. Not certainly the popular and eloquent Dean of Bumblebury, who is so Broad and yet so High. Certainly not the charming and fashionable Vicar of St. Ethelbald's, who is so High and yet so Broad. Still less the clergyman helping in the same parish, who is frankly Low. It is the same on every page, where that spirit inspires that style. "Suffer us not, for any pains of death, to fall from Thee." ... "Ah, that's what gets you" (or words to that effect), as Lord Peter Wimsey truly said of this phrase, in the detective tale of Miss Dorothy Sayers; who, like Lord Peter, knows a good deal about other things besides poisons; and understands her hero's historical traditions very well. But did you ever hear the curate fresh

from the cricket-field, or the vicar smiling under the Union Jacks of the Conservative Rally, dwell upon that penultimate peril; or the danger of falling from God amid the pains of death? Very morbid. Just like those Dago devotional books. So very Roman.

I do not think the old Anglo-Catholics who were my friends, or the many who are still my friends, would deny that there has been a modern vulgarisation of religion, largely through the spread of this official optimism. But though they themselves are often quite free from the vulgar form of it, they could hardly deny that it is largely official and very widely spread. Yet it came as a great shock to me to discover how official and widespread it was. I had exaggerated the importance of an intelligent minority, because it was important to me. But the public and the world without were given up to Arian and Pelagian demagogues like Dean Inge and Dr. Barnes; and a sort of negative Protestantism could still sweep the field. It swept the whole field in the matter of the Prayer-Book. The proposal of an amended Prayer-Book, or rather two alternative Prayer-Books, was not decided for the Church by the Churchy or by the communicants; or by the congregation. It was settled by a mob of politicians, atheists, agnostics, dissenters, Parsees; avowed enemies of that Church or of any Church, who happened to have M.P. after their names. If the whole thing had any historic motto, or deserved anything higher than a headline, what was written across all that Anglican story was not *Ecclesia Anglicana*, or *Via Media*, or anything of the sort; it was *Cujus Regio Ejus Religio*; or rendering unto Caesar the things that are God’s.

I add one incident to contrast Style, among men who had been Catholics for fourteen-hundred years, with that among men who have been Protestants for four-hundred years. A Protestant organisation presented all the atheists, etc., who had voted Protestant, with a big black Bible or Prayer-Book, or both, decorated outside with a picture of the Houses of Parliament. *In hoc signo vinces*. It would be very idolatrous to put a cross or crucifix outside a book; but a picture of Parliament where the Party Funds are kept, and the peerages sold—. That is the temple where dwell the gods of Israel... We know the world progresses, and education is certainly extended, and there are fewer illiterates; and I suppose it is all right. But those four strong centuries of Protestant England begin with a Book of Common-Prayer, in which, even amid the treachery and panic of Cranmer, and in the very moment of men rending themselves from Rome and Christendom, they could lift in such sublime language so authentic a cry of Christian men: “By Thy precious death and burial; by Thy glorious resurrection and ascension; and by the coming of the Holy Ghost.” Those centuries begin with that speech of men still by instinct and habit of mind Catholic; and the Protestant civilization evolves and the education spreads, and widens in wealth and power and towns and colleges; until at last the ripe and final fruit of its culture is produced, in the form of a fat black book of a cushiony sort, with a real photo-view, a view of one of the Sights, nicely tucked in to its neat black padded binding or frame... A Present from Ramsgate... anyhow, four-hundred years’ march from Rome.

## ***V. THE COLLAPSE OF MATERIALISM.***

**SOME** little time ago Dr. David Forsyth delivered to the Section of Psychiatry (Royal Society of Medicine) an address which was certainly a psychological curiosity; of considerable interest to psychologists, pathologists, alienists and all other students of the mental breakdown in the modern world. It was a perfect and compact illustration of the very common combination of a superiority complex with arrested development, and inhibitions on almost all forms of intelligent curiosity. But I mention it here, not because of its narrowness, but of its direct negation of all that is

really new in scientific discovery. It is no news to us that a materialist can be bigoted; but we do not always come upon so startling an example of his being antiquated. It is not worthwhile to take any particular notice of all the diseased stuff about sadism and masochism being the sources of religion. We may note in passing, with a rather dreary amusement, that this sort of writer can never sustain a connected train of thought; and that he gets even these dismal technical terms hopelessly entangled; for he declares that Islam stands for sadism and Christendom for masochism, having just argued that the Christian persecution of heretics was typically sadistic. But all this judgment of great human events, good or bad, in terms of some obscure streak of lunacy, is itself an amusement for lunatics. It is exactly as if a man were to argue: "There is a special sort of madman who thinks he is made of glass; I will call this disease Vitreosity; and I will then show that anybody anywhere, who for any reason had anything to do with glass was a victim of Vitreosity. The desert merchants who were said to have invented glass, the medieval craftsmen who so successfully coloured glass, the early astronomers who first fitted telescopes with lenses of glass, all showed Vitreosity in various stages of that disease; it is akin to subconscious libido because Peeping Tom looked through a window, which may have been made of glass; it is the root impulse of alcoholism, because people drink out of glasses; and Prince Albert and Queen Victoria were obviously stricken with raving and uncontrolled Vitreosity; because they built the Crystal Palace." The slight defect in this theory (which is quite as scientific as Dr. Forsyth's) is that in order to theorise, it is sometimes useful to think. It is obvious that all these people had a thousand other reasons for doing all they did, besides being mad on glass; and it is equally obvious that the great religions, true or false, had a thousand reasons for doing all they did, without being mad on masochism or sadism.

Only, as I say, we may well emerge from this slime and consider the real case of Dr. Forsyth, and his strange ignorance of the very elements of modern thought, and even rather specially of modern science. Now on the larger matter, his thesis was essentially this; that science and religion, so far from being reconciled or even reconcilable, were divided by the vital contradiction that science belongs to what he called "reality-thinking," or we call objective truth; while religion belonged to what he called "pleasure-thinking," or what most people call imagination. I need not mention the hundred obvious objections to this crude division; as, for instance, that religion has not confined itself to imagining pleasurable things, but has often been blamed by people like Dr. Forsyth for imagining unpleasant ones; or that it is arguing in a circle to prove at the end that religion is inconsistent with science merely by assuming at the beginning that it is inconsistent with truth. I am only concerned here to insist, not merely that the view is the reverse of the truth, but that the view is actually the very reverse of the modern view.

If there are two staring and outstanding facts about science and religion at this particular moment, they are these. First, that science is claiming much less than it did to show us a solid and objective reality. And second, that religion is claiming much more than it did (at least for centuries past) that its miracles and marvels of mystical experience can be proved to exist as a solid and objective reality. On the one side, the Atom has entirely lost the objective solidity it had for the nineteenth-century materialists. On the other side, the Ascension is accepted as a case of Levitation by many who would not accept it as an Ascension. On the one hand, the science of physics has almost become a science of metaphysics. For it is not merely, as is often said, that the Atom has become an abstract mathematical formula; it is almost as true to say that it has become a mere algebraic symbol. For the new physicists tell us frankly that what they describe is not the objective reality of the thing they observe; that they are not examining an object as the nineteenth century materialists thought they were examining an object. Some of them tell us that they are only observing certain disturbances or distortions, actually created by their own attempt to observe.

Eddington is more agnostic about the material world than Huxley ever was about the spiritual world. A very unfortunate moment at which to say that science deals directly with reality and objective truth.

On the other hand, on the other plane, the plane of historical and practical argument, it is the very moment at which religion really is appealing to reality and objective truth. The Church throws down the unanswered challenge of Lourdes; the Spiritualists positively claim to prove their new religion by experiments, like a thesis in chemistry or electricity; and a vast number of independent intellectuals, who are neither Catholics nor Spiritualists, have begun to show an entirely new interest in the logical, or even the legal case for some of the great historic miracles. For instance, there have been two or three books following on the line of the brilliant but strictly scientific book called *Who Moved The Stone*; and the tendency of the most detached writers is to admit more and more that the evidence for such events has been underrated. The youngest school of Catholic apologists, such as Father Knox and Mr. Christopher Hollis and Mr. Arnold Lunn, attack almost entirely with the weapons of proof and practical evidence; and it is no longer pretended that they always have the worst of it. A very unfortunate moment at which to say that religion deals only with pleasant fancies and imaginations.

Dr. Forsyth's antiquated style of thought interests me here, however, only as drawing attention to the familiar modern facts of which he seems never to have heard. And most relevant here is the fact of that extraordinary scientific change in the attitude to facts. It has its place in this series, because it is one of the great changes which had not developed in any full and public fashion, even by the time that I finally sought admission to the Church; and, at the much earlier time when I had already begun to think about it, all the popular science that a layman heard of was dominated by the now dead materialism of Haeckel. It is, therefore, true to say that this huge revolution in the philosophy of physical science was one of the world events which came after my conversion; but would have hugely hastened it, if it had come before my conversion. Only the exact nature of the effect, of this scientific revolution upon personal religion, is often misstated and widely misunderstood.

It is not, as some seem to fancy, that we think there is anything particularly Christian about electrons, any more than there is anything essentially atheistic about atoms. It is not that we propose to base our philosophy on their physics; any more than to base our ancient theology on their most recent biology. We are not "going to the country" with a set of slogans or party-cries, like *Electrons for the Elect*, or *For Priest and Proton*. The catastrophic importance for Catholics, of this collapse of materialism, is simply the fact that the most confident cosmic statements of science can collapse. If fifty years hence the electron is as entirely exploded as the atom, it will not affect us; for we have never founded our philosophy on the electron any more than on the atom. But the materialists did found their philosophy on the atom. And it is quite likely that some spiritual fad or other is at this moment being founded on the electron. To a man of my generation, the importance of the change does not consist in its destroying the dogma (which was after all a detail, though a very dogmatic dogma), "Matter consists of indivisible atoms." But it does consist in its destroying the accepted, universal and proclaimed and popularised dogma: "You must accept the conclusions of science." Scores and hundreds of times I have heard, through my youth and early manhood, the repetition of that ultimatum: "You must accept the conclusions of science." And it is that notion or experience that has now been concluded; or rather excluded. Whatever else is questionable, there is henceforth no question of anybody "accepting" the conclusions of science. The new scientists themselves do not ask us to accept the conclusions of science. The new scientists themselves do not accept the

conclusions of the new science. To do them justice, they deny vigorously that science has concluded; or that it has, in that sense, any conclusion. The finest intellects among them repeat, again and again, that science is inconclusive.

Which is all very well, and all very wise, and all very true to the gradual adjustment of truths on their own plane. But meanwhile—there is such a thing as human life. The Victorian agnostics waited hopefully for science to give them a working certainty about life. The new physicist philosophers are in no way different, except that they wait hopelessly instead of hopefully. For they know very well the real meaning of relativity; that their own views may pass from being relatively right to being relatively wrong. And meanwhile, as I say, there is such a thing as wanting a working rule as to whether we should pay our debts or murder our enemies. We would not wait for a nineteenth-century enlightenment that might come. We certainly will not wait for a twentieth-century enlightenment that cannot come. If we want a guide to life, it seems that we must look elsewhere.

## ***VI. THE CASE OF SPAIN.***

**THE** point of the recent political story in Spain has never been put clearly in the English papers; perhaps not quite clearly even in the Catholic papers. It is a very striking example of how the world has really moved, since my own most important change of conviction occurred. There is a paradox in every story of conversion; which is perhaps the reason why the records of it are never ideally satisfactory. It is in its very nature the extinction of egoism: and yet every account of it must sound egoistic. It means, at least in the case of the Religion in question, a recognition of reality which has nothing to do with relativity. It is as if a man said, "This inn really exists, even if I have never found it"; or, "My home is actually in this village; and would be there, if I had never reached it." It is the recognition that the truth is true, apart from the truth-seeker; and yet the description must be the autobiography of a truth-seeker; generally a rather depressing sort of person. It will therefore sound egotistical, if I preface these remarks by saying that I was for a long time a Liberal in the sense of belonging to the Liberal Party. I am still a Liberal; it is only the Liberal Party that has disappeared. I understood its ideal to be that of equal citizenship and personal freedom; and they are my own political ideals to this day. The point here, however, is that I worked for a long time with the practical organization of Liberalism; I wrote for a great part of my life for the old Daily News; and I knew of course that it identified political liberty, rightly or wrongly, with representative government. Then came the breach, on which I need not insist; except by saying that I became quite convinced of two facts. First, that representative government had ceased to be representative. Second, that Parliament was in fact gravely menaced by political corruption. Politicians did not represent the populace, even the most noisy and vulgar of the populace. Politicians did not deserve the dignified name of demagogues. They deserved no name except perhaps the name of bagmen; they were travelling for private firms. If they represented anything, it was vested interests, vulgar but not even popular.

For this reason, when the Fascists' revolt appeared in Italy, I could not be entirely hostile to it; for I knew the hypocritical plutocracy against which it rebelled. But neither could I be entirely friendly to it; for I believed in the civic equality in which the politicians pretended to believe. For the present purpose, the problem can be put very briefly. The whole of the real case for Fascism can be put in two words never printed in our newspapers: secret societies. The whole case against Fascism could be put in one word now never used and almost forgotten: legitimacy. For the first, the Fascist

was justified in smashing the politicians; for their contract with the people was secretly contradicted by their secret contracts with gangs and conspiracies. For the second, Fascism could never be quite satisfactory; for it did not rest on authority but only on power; which is the weakest thing in the world. The Fascists said in effect, "We may not be the majority, but we are the most vigorous and intelligent minority." Which is simply challenging any other intelligent minority to show that it is more vigorous. It may well end in the very anarchy it attempted to avoid. Compared with this, despotism and democracy are legitimate. I mean there is no doubt about who is the King's eldest son or about who has most votes in the most mechanical election. But a mere competition of intelligent minorities is a rather dreadful prospect. That, it seems to me, is a fair statement of the case for and against the Fascist movement. And now I should like to apply it to the curious case of Spain; and note how Liberalism met the issue.

For weeks and months on end my old organ the *Daily News* (now the *News-Chronicle*) had warned the public of all these doubtful and dangerous implications of Fascism. It had reviled Fascism for its vices; and rather more virulently for its virtues. But anyhow it had furiously denounced the notion of a minority imposing its will by mere violence, by weapons or military training, in contempt of the constitutional democracy in which the people expressed its will through Parliament. I think there is a great deal to be said for that view; especially in England, where Parliament is really normal and national as it never was in Italy or Germany. I could write much for and much against the Liberal theory as enunciated in the *News-Chronicle*, And then, suddenly, the whole case was thrown over, and turned upside down, in face of the simple situation in Spain.

First it must be remembered that the Church is always in advance of the world. That is why it is said to be behind the times. It discussed everything so long ago that people have forgotten the discussion. St. Thomas was an internationalist before all our internationalists; St. Joan was a nationalist almost before there were nations; Blessed Robert Bellarmine said all there is to be said for democracy before any ordinary worldling dared to be a democrat; and (what is to the purpose here) the Christian social reform was in full activity before any of these quarrels of Fascists and Bolsheviks appeared. The Popular Party was working out the ideas of Leo XIII before a single Blackshirt had been seen in Italy. The same popular ideals had been moving in Spain; with the result that they had really become popular. There were other complications, of course; the Court had never been quite popular; the Dictatorship had not, I think, been imaginative about the curious problem of Catalonia; but all this did not effect the profound and popular Catholic change. The Pope particularly insisted that he had no objection to the Republic as such; there was no opposition to anything but to certain inhuman ideals, by which men would lose humanity in losing personal liberty and property. Well, in the perfectly fair and open intellectual interchange, in which all Liberals are supposed to believe, the Catholic ideals won. At an entirely peaceful and legal election, exactly like any English election, a vast majority voted in various degrees for the traditional truths, which had been normal to the Nation for much more than a thousand years. Spain spoke; if indeed elections do speak; and declared constitutionally against Communism, against Atheism, against the negation that starved normality in our time. Nobody said that this majority had been achieved by military violence. Nobody pretended that an armed minority had imposed it on the State. If the Liberal theory of Parliamentary majorities was just, this was just. If the Parliamentary system was a popular system, this was popular. And then the Socialists suddenly jumped up and did exactly everything that the Fascists have been blamed for doing. They used bombs and guns and instruments of violence to prevent the fulfilment of the will of the people, or at least of the will of the Parliament. Having lost the game by the rules of democracy, they tried to win it after all entirely by the rules of war; in this case of Civil War. They tried to overthrow a pacific Parliament by a militarist *coup d'état*. In short,



they behaved exactly like Mussolini; or rather they did the very worst that has ever been attributed to Mussolini; and without a rag of his theoretical excuse.

And what did Liberalism say? What did my dear old friends of liberty and peaceful citizenship say? Naturally, I assumed on opening the paper that it would rally to the defense of Parliament and peaceful representative government and rebuke the attempt to make a minority dominant by mere military violence. Judge of my astonishment, when I found Liberals lamenting aloud over the unfortunate failure of these Socialistic Fascists to reverse the result of a General Election. I had been a Liberal in the old Liberal days; we were not unacquainted with Tory and Unionist victories at the polls; we had often gone contentedly into Opposition. It had never been suggested that when Balfour or Baldwin constitutionally became Prime Ministers, all the Nonconformists should go out with guns and bayonets to reverse the popular vote; or the Leader of the Opposition begin to throw dynamite at the elected Leader of the House. The only inference was that Liberalism was only opposed to militarists when they were Fascists; and entirely approved of Fascists so long as they were Socialists.

Now that is a small and purely political point. But to me it was very awakening. It showed me quite clearly the fundamental truth of the modern world. And that is this: there are no Fascists; there are no Socialists; there are no Liberals; there are no Parliamentarians. There is the one supremely inspiring and irritating institution in the world; and there are its enemies. Its enemies are ready to be for violence or against violence, for liberty or against liberty, for representation or against representation; and even for peace or against peace. It gave me an entirely new certainty, even in the practical and political sense, that I had chosen well.

## ***VII. THE WELL AND THE SHALLOWS***

IN numberless novels and newspaper articles, we have all read about a process which is still apparently regarded as novel or new; though it has been described in almost exactly the same terms for nearly a hundred years; and in slightly different terms for hundreds of years before that. I mean what is called the growth of doubt or the disturbance of faith; and the only point about it which is pertinent here is this; that it is always described as a revolt of the deeper parts of the mind against something that is comparatively superficial. We need not deny that modern doubt, like ancient doubt, does ask deep questions; we only deny that, as compared with our own philosophy, it gives any deeper answers. And it is a general rule, touching what is called modern thought, that while the questions are often really deep, the answers are often decidedly shallow. And it is perhaps even more important to remark that, while the questions are in a sense eternal, the answers are in every sense ephemeral. The world is still asking the questions that were asked by Job. The world will not long be contented with the answers that are given by Joad.

The chances of the Book of Joad being as permanent as the Book of Job are limited by certain perfectly practical calculations. Mr. Joad is an able and sincere man; and nobody doubts that his opinions are the product of his own mind; but they are very unmistakably the product of his own age. In this case it would be more correct to say, of his own generation. For the sceptics throughout the ages inherit nothing except a negation. Their positive policy or ideal varies, not only from century to century, but even from father to son. A free-thinker like Bradlaugh, coming out of the individualistic nineteenth century and the mercantile spirit of the Midlands, was careful to explain that he was an Individualist. A free-thinker of the next generation, like Mr. Joseph McCabe, was careful to explain that he was a Socialist. A free-thinker wanting to make a splash to-day would

almost certainly insist that he was not a Socialist; which has come to mean something as mild as Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. For those who can believe in each of these social moves in turn, as they happen to turn up, the matter may be irrelevant. But some of us will simply draw the moral which determines the whole question of this issue between the traditions of truth and doubt. Those who leave the tradition of truth do not escape into something which we call Freedom. They only escape into something else, which we call Fashion.

That is really the crux of the controversy between the two views of history and philosophy. If it were true that by leaving the temple we walked out into a world of truths, the question would be answered; but it is not true. By leaving the temple, we walk out into a world of idols; and the idols of the marketplace are more perishable and passing than the gods of the temple we have left. If we wished to test rationally the case of rationalism, we should follow the career of the sceptic and ask how far he remained sceptical about the idols or ideals of the world into which he went. There are very few sceptics in history who cannot be proved to have been instantly swallowed by some swollen convention or some hungry humbug of the hour, so that all their utterances about contemporary things now look to us almost pathetically contemporary. The little group of Atheists, who still run their paper in Fleet Street and frequently honour me with hearty but somewhat hasty denunciation, began their agitation in the old Victorian days, and selected for themselves a terribly appropriate title. They did not call themselves Atheists, they called themselves Secularists. Never was a more bitter and blighting confession made in the form of a boast. For the word "secular" does not mean anything so sensible as "worldly." It does not even mean anything so spirited as "irreligious." To be secular simply means to be of the age; that is, of the age which is passing; of the age which, in their case, is already passed. There is one tolerably correct translation of the Latin word which they have chosen as their motto. There is one adequate equivalent of the word "secular"; and it is the word "dated."

In the essays in this series, I have considered some of the effects of this continuous process of time and change, as it has affected the world, even after I myself ceased to look to its changes for essential guidance. I have noted that the changes, which continue to occur, point more and more to the truth of the unchanging philosophy which stands apart from them. I could add, of course, a long list of other examples of exactly the same truth. I could point, for instance, to the collapse of Prohibition; not so much in the narrow sense of Prohibition as in the general sense of Prohibitionism. For what failed with the American experiment was not merely a particular chemical experiment with some alleged chemical constituent, which they chose to call alcohol. It was a whole attitude towards all the complex uses and abuses of human things. The great outstanding principle of the modern materialistic world has been Prohibition; even Prohibition in the abstract. Where we say that a social element is dangerous or doubtful, that it must be watched, that it may on due occasion be restrained, the thing that was called the Modern Mind always cried aloud with a voice of thunder that it must be forbidden. The Prohibitionist declares that there must be no wine; the Pacifist that there must be no war; the Communist that there must be no private property; the Secularist that there must be no religious worship. The failure of Prohibition in the one country in which it was a favourite, in which it was a popular ideal in so far as anything so inhuman can be popular, was the collapse of the whole conception of wiping out entirely the temptations of man and the trials of mortal life. After that, it is tacitly agreed that there is no such simple way out of moral problems; it is almost admitted that they must be referred to the moral sense. We were actually driven back on the desperate and tragic duty of our fathers, of deciding for ourselves whether we were drinking too much, or whether we were fighting in a just quarrel, or whether we were only defending our own lawful property, or getting other people's property by lawless usury. Such a

demand was naturally a great strain on the Modern Mind. For the Modern Mind is not at all accustomed to making up its mind. It finds the task almost as unfamiliar as working its own farm or practising its own craft; or doing a hundred other things, that human beings had done from the foundations of the world. In short, it would not accept the Catholic doctrine that human life is a battle; it only wanted to have it announced, from time to time in the newspapers, that it was a victory.

There are, I say, a number of other more general defeats of the attack on the Faith, on each of which it would be easy to write a long essay; the longer as the essential truth in the matter was more subtle and more universal. But I will close this series with the examples which I have given, because I think they suffice to show the general trend of the truth which I desire to suggest. The simplest summary of my meaning is to throw my mind back to all the things that seemed in my youth to be the rivals or reasonable alternatives to my religious conviction, and consider whether they could still play even the part which they did. The answer is that not one of them could now even remotely resemble a rival; or be even reasonable as an alternative. There was a time when men of my sympathies felt even tragically the quarrel between the Republic and the Church; the apparent misunderstanding between political equality and mystical authority. It is a commonplace to-day that the world has reacted much more against equality than against authority. But that in itself would not have disposed of the democratic ideals of any sincere democrat. It is the thing called democracy that has itself disappointed the democrat. However much I might hate the Fascists, heartily as I do indeed despise the Hitlerites, that would never restore the mere abstract faith in the Republicans. If I lost my religion to-morrow, I could not again believe that the mere fact of turning Kamchatka from a Monarchy to a Republic would solve all its social sins. I have seen too many Republicans, with their greasy platform promises and their guzzling secret societies. I can remember when being a Socialist was a real inspiration to youth; but anybody who thinks it could be an inspiration to the more elderly phase of maturity, has only to look at the more elderly Socialists. In short, the point I mentioned at the beginning of this article is the point of the whole matter; that while the questions are still deep and tragic enough, the recent answers have not really been revolutionary, but only superficial. I could not abandon the faith, without falling back on something more shallow than the faith. I could not cease to be a Catholic, except by becoming something more narrow than a Catholic. A man must narrow his mind in order to lose the universal philosophy; everything that has happened up to this very day has confirmed this conviction; and whatever happens to-morrow will confirm it anew. We have come out of the shallows and the dry places to the one deep well; and the Truth is at the bottom of it.

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## THE RETURN TO RELIGION

IN the days when Huxley and Herbert Spencer and the Victorian agnostics were trumpeting as a final truth the famous hypothesis of Darwin, it seemed to thousands of simple people almost impossible that religion should survive. It is all the more ironic that it has not only survived them all, but it is a perfect example (perhaps the only real example) of what they called the Survival of the Fittest. It so happens that it does really and truly fit in with the theory offered by Darwin; which was something totally different from most of the theories accepted by Darwinians. This real original theory of Darwin has since very largely broken down in the general field of biology and botany; but it does actually apply to this particular argument in the field of religious history. The recent re-

emergence of our religion is a survival of the fittest as Darwin meant it, and not as popular Darwinism meant it; so far as it meant anything. Among the innumerable muddles, which mere materialistic fashion made out of the famous theory, there was in many quarters a queer idea that the Struggle for Existence was of necessity an actual struggle between the candidates for survival; literally a cut-throat competition. There was a vague idea that the strongest creature violently crushed the others. And the notion that this was the one method of improvement came everywhere as good news to bad men; to bad rulers, to bad employers, to swindlers and sweaters and the rest. The brisk owner of a bucket-shop compared himself modestly to a mammoth, trampling down other mammoths in the primeval jungle. The business man destroyed other business men, under the extraordinary delusion that the eohippic horse had devoured other eohippic horses. The rich man suddenly discovered that it was not only convenient but cosmic to starve or pillage the poor, because pterodactyls may have used their little hands to tear each other's eyes. Science, that nameless being, declared that the weakest must go to the wall; especially in Wall Street. There was a rapid decline and degradation in the sense of responsibility in the rich, from the merely rationalistic eighteenth century to the purely scientific nineteenth. The great Jefferson, when he reluctantly legalised slavery, said he trembled for his country, knowing that God is just. The profiteer of later times, when he legalised usury or financial trickery, was satisfied with himself; knowing that Nature is unjust. But, however that may be (and of course the moral malady has survived scientific mistake) the people who talked thus of cannibal horses and competitive oysters, did not understand what Darwin's thesis was. If later biologists have condemned it, it should not be condemned without being understood, widely as it has been accepted without being understood. The point of Darwinism was not that a bird with a longer beak (let us say) thrust it into other birds, and had the advantage of a duellist with a longer sword. The point of Darwinism was that the bird with the longer beak could reach worms (let us say) at the bottom of a deeper hole; that the birds who could not do so would die; and he alone would remain to found a race of long-beaked birds. Darwinism suggested that if this happened a vast number of times, in a vast series of ages, it might account for the difference between the beaks of a sparrow and a stork. But the point was that the fittest did not need to struggle against the unfit. The survivor had nothing to do except to survive, when the others could not survive. He survived because he alone had the features and organs necessary for survival. And, whatever be the truth about mammoths or monkeys, that is the exact truth about the present survival of religion. It is surviving because nothing else can survive.

Religion has returned; because all the various forms of scepticism that tried to take its place, and do its work, have by this time tied themselves into such knots that they cannot do anything. That chain of causation of which they were fond of talking seems really to have served them after the fashion of the proverbial rope; and when modern discussion gave them rope enough, they quite rapidly hanged themselves. For there is not a single one of the fashionable forms of scientific scepticism, or determinism, that does not end in stark paralysis, touching the practical conduct of human life. Take any three of the normal and necessary ideas on which civilisation and even society depend. First, let us say, a scientific man of the old normal nineteenth-century sort would remark, "We can at least have common sense, in its proper meaning of a sense of reality common to all; we can have common morals, for without them we cannot even have a community; a man must in the ordinary sense obey the law; and especially the moral law." Then the newer sceptic, who is progressive and has gone further and fared worse, will immediately say, "Why should you worship the taboo of your particular tribe? Why should you accept prejudices that are the product of a blind herd instinct? Why is there any authority in the unanimity of a flock of frightened sheep?" Suppose the normal man falls back on the deeper argument: "I am not terrorised by the tribe; I do keep my

independent judgment; I have a conscience and a light of justice within, which judges the world." And the stronger sceptic will answer: "If the light in your body be darkness—and it is darkness because it is only in your body—what are your judgments but the incurable twist and bias of your particular heredity and accidental environment? What can we know about judgments, except that they must all be equally unjust? For they are all equally conditioned by defects and individual ignorances, all of them different and none of them distinguishable; for there exists no single man so sane and separate as to be able to distinguish them justly. Why should your conscience be any more reliable than your rotting teeth or your quite special defect of eyesight? God bless us all, one would think you believed in God!" Then perhaps the normal person will get annoyed and say rather snappishly, "At least I suppose we are men of science; there is science to appeal to and she will always answer; the evidential and experimental discovery of real things." And the other sceptic will answer, if he has any sense of humour: "Why certainly. Sir Arthur Eddington is Science; and he will tell you that science cannot destroy religion, or even defend the multiplication table. Sir Bertram Windle was Science; and he would tell you that the scientific mind is completely satisfied in the Roman Catholic Church. For that matter. Sir Oliver Lodge was Science; and he reached by purely experimental and evidential methods to a solid belief in ghosts. But I admit that there are men of science who cannot get to a solid belief in anything; even in science; even in themselves. There is the crystallographer of Cambridge who writes in the Spectator the lucid sentence: 'We know that most of what we know is probably untrue.' Does that help you on a bit, in founding your sane and solid society?"

We have of course seen just lately the most dramatic exit of great material scientists from the camp of Materialism. It was Eddington I think, who used the phrase that the universe seems to be more like a great thought than a great machine: and Dr. Whitney as reported, has declared that there is no rational description of the ultimate cosmic motion except the Will of God. But it is the perishing of the other things, at least as much as the persistence of the one thing, that has left us at last face to face with the ancient religion of our fathers. The thing once called free thought has come finally to threaten everything that is free. It denies personal freedom in denying free will and the human power of choice. It threatens civic freedom with a plague of hygienic and psychological quackeries; spreading over the land such a network of pseudo-scientific nonsense as free citizens have never yet endured in history. It is quite likely to reverse religious freedom, in the name of some barbarous nostrum or other, such as constitutes the crude and ill-cultured creed of Russia. It is perfectly capable of imposing silence and impotence from without. But there is no doubt whatever that it imposes silence and impotence from within. The whole trend of it, which began as a drive and has ended in a drift, is towards some form of the theory that a man cannot help himself; that a man cannot mend himself; above all, that a man cannot free himself. In all its novels and most of its newspaper articles it takes for granted that men are stamped and fixed in certain types of abnormality of anarchical weakness; that they are pinned and labelled in a museum of morality or immorality; or of that sort of unmorality which is more priggish than the one and more hoggish than the other. We are practically told that we might as well ask a fossil to reform itself. We are told that we are asking a stuffed bird to repent. We are all dead, and the only comfort is that we are all classified. For by this philosophy, which is the same as that of the blackest of Puritan heresies, we all died before we were born. But as it is Kismet without Allah, so also it is Calvinism without God.

The agnostics will be gratified to learn that it is entirely due to their own energy and enterprise, to their own activity in pursuing their own antics, that the world has at last tired of their antics and told them so. We have done very little against them; *non nobis, Domine*; the glory of their final overthrow is all their own. We have done far less than we should have done, to explain all that

balance of subtlety and sanity which is meant by a Christian civilisation. Our thanks are due to those who have so generously helped us by giving a glimpse of what might be meant by a Pagan civilisation. And what is lost in that society is not so much religion as reason; the ordinary common daylight of intellectual instinct that has guided the children of men. A world in which men know that most of what they know is probably untrue cannot be dignified with the name of a sceptical world; it is simply an impotent and abject world, not attacking anything, but accepting everything while trusting nothing; accepting even its own incapacity to attack; accepting its own lack of authority to accept; doubting its very right to doubt. We are grateful for this public experiment and demonstration; it has taught us much. We did not believe that rationalists were so utterly mad until they made it quite clear to us. We did not ourselves think that the mere denial of our dogmas could end in such dehumanised and demented anarchy. It might have taken the world a long time to understand that what it had been taught to dismiss as mediaeval theology was often mere common sense; although the very term common sense, or *communis sententia*, was a mediaeval conception. But it took the world very little time to understand that the talk on the other side was most uncommon nonsense. It was nonsense that could not be made the basis of any common system, such as has been founded upon common sense.

To take one example out of many; the whole question of Marriage has been turned into a question of Mood. The enemies of marriage did not have the patience to remain in their relatively strong position; that marriage could not be proved to be sacramental, and that some exceptions must be treated as exceptions, so long as it was merely social. They could not be content to say that it is not a sacrament but a contract, and that exceptional legal action might break a contract. They brought objections against it that would be quite as facile and quite as futile, if brought against any other contract. They said that a man is never in the same mood for ten minutes together; that he must not be asked to admire in a red daybreak what he admired in a yellow sunset; that no man can say he will even be the same man by the next month or the next minute; that new and nameless tortures may afflict him if his wife wears a different hat; or that he may plunge her into hell by putting on a pair of socks that does not harmonise with somebody else's carpet. It is quite obvious that this sort of sensitive insanity applies as much to any other human relation as to this relation. A man cannot choose a profession; because, long before he has qualified as an architect, he may have mystically changed into an aviator, or been convulsed in rapid succession by the emotions of a ticket-collector, a trombone-player and a professional harpooner of whales. A man dare not buy a house for fear a fatal stranger with the wrong sort of socks should come into it; or for fear his own mind should be utterly changed in the matter of carpets or cornices. A man may suddenly decline to do any business with his own business partner; because he also, like the cruel husband, wears the wrong necktie. And I saw a serious printed appeal for sympathy for a wife, who deserted her family because her psychology was incompatible with an orange necktie. This is only one application, as I say; but it exactly illustrates how the sceptical principle is now applied; and how scepticism has recently changed from apparent sense to quite self-evident nonsense. The heresies not only decay but destroy themselves; in any case they perish without a blow.

For the reply, not merely of religion but of reason and the rooted sanity of mankind, is obvious enough. "If you feel like that, why certainly you will not found families; or found anything else. You will not build houses; you will not make partnerships; you will not in any fashion do the business of the world. You will never plant a tree, lest you wish next week you had planted it somewhere else; you will never put a potato into a pot or stew, because it will be too late to take it out again; your whole mood is stricken and riddled with cowardice and sterility; your whole way of attacking any problem is to think of excuses for not attacking it at all. Very well; so be it; the Lord

be with you. You may be respected for being sincere; you may be pitied for being sensitive; you may retain some of the corrective qualities which make it useful on occasion to be sceptical. But if you are too sceptical to do these things, you must stand out of the way of those who can do them; you must hand over the world to those who believe that the world is workable; to those who believe that men can make houses, make partnerships, make appointments, make promises—and keep them. And if it is necessary in order to keep a promise or boil a potato or behave like a human being, to believe in God making Man, in God being made Man, or in God made Man coming in the clouds in glory—well, then you must at least give a chance to these credulous fanatics who can believe the one and who can do the other." That is what I mean by the spiritual Survival of the Fittest. That is why the old phrase, which is probably a mistake in natural history, is a truth in supernatural history. The organic thing called religion has in fact the organs that take hold on life. It can feed where the fastidious doubter finds no food; it can reproduce where, the solitary sceptic boasts of being barren. It may be accepting a miracle to believe in free will; but it is accepting madness, sooner or later, to disbelieve in it. It may be a wild risk to make a vow; but it is a quiet, crawling and inevitable ruin to refuse to make a vow. It may be incredible that one creed is the truth and the others are relatively false; but it is not only incredible, but also intolerable, that there is no truth either in or out of creeds, and all are equally false. For nobody can ever set anything right, if everybody is equally wrong. The intense interest of the moment is that the Man of Science, the hero of the modern world and the latest of the great servants of humanity, has suddenly and dramatically refused to have anything more to do with this dreary business of nibbling negation, and blind scratching and scraping away of the very foundations of the mastery of man. For the work of the sceptic for the past hundred years has indeed been very like the fruitless fury of some primeval monster; eyeless, mindless, merely destructive and devouring; a giant worm wasting away a world that he could not even see; a benighted and bestial life, unconscious of its own cause and of its own consequences. But Man has taken to himself again his own weapons; will and worship and reason and the vision of the plan in things; and we are once more in the morning of the world.

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## THE LAST TURN

**THE** only difficulty about the evident reawakening of Catholicism in modern England, is that conversion calls on a man to stretch his mind, as a man awakening from a sleep may stretch his arms and legs. It calls on the imagination to stretch itself, for instance, over a wider area than England, and a longer period than English history. And, for certain rather curious reasons, the stretching of the mind generally stops short of anything like a complete comprehension of any great historical or philosophical process. This is what Bernard Shaw meant when he said that the world will never really progress, until every man lives for three hundred years. I remember remarking at the time that there was a sort of truth symbolised in this; and that, most certainly, if Bernard Shaw had lived for three hundred years he would be a Catholic.

This preliminary point can be quite sufficiently proved even from this particular case. Three hundred years would mean that he would remember, as part of the positive poetry of childhood, the first phase of the Reformation. The first phase of the Reformation in England was the Divine Right of Kings. It was a romantic enthusiasm for Royalty itself, and the duty of an utterly prostrate passive obedience to it. This was the first effect of the New Religion; but before the child was barely a boy it would be overthrown by another New Religion. The Calvinist killed the sacred King, who

had been sacred enough to kill the Church; and darkened the land with a creed of Total Depravity and the Scottish Sabbath. By the time Mr. Shaw was a growing lad of only a hundred years old, the world would have rebelled against this tyranny in turn. The Scottish Mr. Hume would soon be preparing to burst up the Scottish Sabbath. The ingenious Mr. Rousseau would be denying Total Depravity and asserting Total Innocence, Naturalness and Niceness. Out of this, as he grew to maturity, nearing a century and a half, there would grow gradually the most pleasant and plausible, the most happy, healthy and exhilarating of all the purely human visions: the vision of Liberty. Let men be only free from their feudal chains and theological gags; let them speak as they like, write as they like, buy and sell as they like, trade and travel and enquire as they like; and the race will waken from the nightmare of ages into the broad brotherhood of reason and justice. About the time when Mr. Shaw's first grey hair appeared, in the year 1832, when he was barely two hundred, there was much talk about a Reform Bill in England; but I do not think Mr. Shaw would have been taken in, even then. Already, for a long time, men had been buying and selling as they liked, and trading and travelling as they liked. And already the result stood up solid and enormous, in the thing called Capitalism: that is the dispossession of the populace of all forms of real productive property; all instruments of production in the hands of the few; all the millions merely the servants of the few, working for a wage, always an insecure wage, generally a mean and inhuman wage. It was when this process had gone even further that the real historical Mr. Bernard Shaw was born; with the natural consequence that Mr. Bernard Shaw has devoted his life to making war on Capitalism. He has done so because the special evil of his own lifetime was Capitalism. But shall we not guess that he would have done it rather differently, if he had already spent two or three lifetimes warring against Divine Right, and then against the Calvinism that attacked Divine Right, and then against the Rousseauan prostration before Liberty, which destroyed Calvinism—and produced Capitalism. Would he not conclude that the whole State had been staggering about in a most extraordinary and irrational manner, ever since he was first born under the Elizabethan Settlement? Would it not be obvious that the mind of man had been filled with nothing but frantic exaggerations, crude simplifications, provincial panaceas and quack medicines and sheer raving monomania, ever since it had broken away from the central civilisation and the philosophy which the Saints had handed down from the Ancients? Would it not interest him to find that, all the time, there had been written in the open books of Aquinas or Bellarmine or Suarez, a perfectly reasonable apportionment of the authority of princes, the claims of peoples, the possibilities of democracy, the use and abuse of property, and the right function of freedom?

Three hundred years felt with their full weight, really measured out in time and experience, endured as a man actually endures the passage of his days, would prove the whole Protestant story to have been the most preposterous and disproportionate detour, or straggling a chapter of accidents, that ever set out in the wrong direction and came back to the same place. For we have in a hundred ways come back to the same place; even to the detail of an exaggerated reaction, like that of the Action Française, renewing the absolute appeal to The King. And nothing is more amusing than to note the way in which those who regard themselves as the most advanced leaders, of the most modern groups, are already rearing and bucking against the whole tendency of liberal and humanitarian progress, which the last revolutionary leaders marked out for them. Nobody is less in the spirit of Walt Whitman than Wyndham Lewis or T. S. Eliot; nobody less a real heir of H. G. Wells than Aldous Huxley; nobody less disposed to follow the humanitarian paths of Mr. Nevinson the adventurous journalist, than his son Mr. Nevinson the Futurist painter. All these of the most recent school of rebels are rebelling against rebellion; that is, against the Revolution and all its heritage of liberty, equality and fraternity. Mr. Eliot, though an American, is an avowed Royalist.



Mr. Nevinson has become a quite ferocious Kiplingite Imperialist. Mr. Wyndham Lewis seems to prefer a Dictatorship, in so far as he may be said to prefer anything. All this last turn of the twisting road of progress is pointing back towards what we have called for a hundred years reaction. It is apparent in the Fascists; in the Hitlerites; and even in the open anti-democracy of the Bolsheviks.

Now the great danger of the moment is that young men will go on being content with these revolts against revolt, these reactions against reactions; so that we have nothing but an everlasting seesaw of the Old Young and the New Young; the last always content with its fleeting triumph over the last but one. And the only way to avoid that result is to teach men to stretch their minds and inhabit a larger period of time. It is to insist, not that we now feel inclined to stress this or stress that, in mere fashion or mere fatigue, but that there really does exist somewhere a reasonable plan of the proportions of things, which, at least in its general outline, is true all the time. The moment men, so intelligent as those I have named, begin to realise that this permanent plan is necessary, they will certainly realise that the only existing plan, that has any plausible claim to look like it, is the plan of the Catholic Faith. For the present, they seem to be quite content to continue the old squabble of fathers and sons; even if the fathers are very young fathers, or the sons actually appeal to the grandfathers against them. But this merely modern squabble is after all local and therefore provincial; it can never satisfy the thirst of thinking people for the reality of things. Nevertheless, as I stated at the beginning, the great difficulty is whether a man can stretch his mind, or (as the moderns would say) can broaden his mind, enough to see the need for an eternal Church.

And yet surely this is only the last lap in the long race in which the ancient truth, so heavily handicapped, has one by one outdistanced all the runners who prided themselves on their youth or their advance positions. If a man could have learned it by a process of elimination, merely by living through the last three hundred years, he would learn the same lesson even more clearly by living through the next three hundred years. By that time it will be more apparent than ever that these jerks of novelty do not create either a progress or an equilibrium. The very newest of the intellectuals have already learnt not to trust to mere progress, in the sense of a process of change; they already know that they have sometimes more in common with some antique authority than with some merely modern rebellion. Some of them would set up Dictators to enforce obedience; it is hard if we may not obey willingly, when they would have men obey even unwillingly. They would set up violent authority in the hands of individuals; they can hardly complain if we recognise merely moral authority in a merely mystical office. For that mystical office contains all the liberties and all the philosophies, and judges only upon their right balance and proportion; and every other thing that the moderns call a movement is only securing for a monomania the brief life of a sect.

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## MARY AND THE CONVERT

I WAS brought up in a part of the Protestant world which can best be described by saying that it referred to the Blessed Virgin as the Madonna. Sometimes it referred to her as a Madonna; from a general memory of Italian pictures. It was not a bigoted or uneducated world; it did not regard all Madonnas as idols or all Italians as Dagoes. But it had selected this expression, by the English instinct for compromise, so as to avoid both reverence and irreverence. It was, when we came to think about it, a very curious expression. It amounted to saying that a Protestant must not call Mary "Our Lady," but he may call her "My Lady." This would seem, in the abstract, to indicate an even more intimate and mystical familiarity than the Catholic devotion. But I need not

say that it was not so. It was not untouched by that queer Victorian evasion; of translating dangerous or improper words into foreign languages. But it was also not untouched by a certain sincere though vague respect for the part that Madonnas had played, in the actual cultural and artistic history of our civilisation. Certainly the ordinary reasonably reverent Englishman would never have intended to be disrespectful to that tradition in that aspect; even when he was much less liberal, travelled and well-read than were my own parents. Certainly, on the other hand, he was entirely unaware that he was saying "My Lady"; and if you had pointed out to him that, in fact, he was generally saying "a My Lady," or "the My Lady," he would have agreed that it was rather odd.

I do not forget, and indeed it would be a very thankless thing in me to forget, that I was lucky in this relative reasonableness and moderation of my own family and friends; and that there is a whole Protestant world that would consider such moderation a very poor-spirited sort of Protestantism. That strange mania against Mariolatry; that mad vigilance that watches for the first faint signs of the cult of Mary as for the spots of a plague; that apparently presumes her to be perpetually and secretly encroaching upon the prerogatives of Christ; that logically infers from a mere glimpse of the blue robe the presence of the Scarlet Woman—all that I have never felt or known or understood, even as a child; nor did those who had the care of my childhood. They knew nothing to speak of about the Catholic Church; they certainly did not know that anybody connected with them was ever likely to belong to it; but they did know that noble and beautiful ideas had been presented to the world under the form of this sacred figure, as under that of the Greek gods or heroes. But, while putting aside all pretense that this Protestant atmosphere was actively an anti-Catholic atmosphere, I may still say that my personal case was a little curious.

I have here rashly undertaken to write on a subject at once intimate and daring; a subject which ought indeed, by its own majesty, to make it impossible to be egotistical; but which does also make it impossible to be anything but personal. "Mary and the Convert" is the most personal of topics, because conversion is something more personal and less corporate than communion; and involves isolated feelings as an introduction to collective feelings. But also because the cult of Mary is in a rather peculiar sense a personal cult; over and above that greater sense that must always attach to the worship of a personal God. God is God, Maker of all things visible and invisible; the Mother of God is in a rather special sense connected with things visible; since she is of this earth, and through her bodily being God was revealed to the senses. In the presence of God, we must remember what is invisible, even in the sense of what is merely intellectual; the abstractions and the absolute laws of thought; the love of truth, and the respect for right reason and honourable logic in things, which God himself has respected. For, as St. Thomas Aquinas insists, God himself does not contradict the law of contradiction. But Our Lady, reminding us especially of God Incarnate, does in some degree gather up and embody all those elements of the heart and the higher instincts, which are the legitimate short cuts to the love of God. Dealing with those personal feelings, even in this rude and curt outline, is therefore very far from easy. I hope I shall not be misunderstood if the example I take is merely personal; since it is this particular part of religion that really cannot be impersonal. It may be an accident, or a highly unmerited favour of heaven, but anyhow it is a fact, that I always had a curious longing for the remains of this particular tradition, even in a world where it was regarded as a legend. I was not only haunted by the idea while still stuck in the ordinary stage of schoolboy scepticism; I was affected by it before that, before I had shed the ordinary nursery religion in which the Mother of God had no fit or adequate place. I found not long ago, scrawled in very bad handwriting, screeds of an exceedingly bad imitation of Swinburne, which was, nevertheless, apparently addressed to what I should have called a picture of the Madonna. And I can distinctly remember reciting the lines of the "Hymn To Proserpine," out of pleasure in their roll and

resonance; but deliberately directing them away from Swinburne's intention, and supposing them addressed to the new Christian Queen of life, rather than to the fallen Pagan queen of death.

"But I turn to her still; having seen she shall surely abide in the end;

Goddess and maiden and queen, be near me now and befriend."

And I had obscurely, from that time onwards, the very vague but slowly clarifying idea of defending all that Constantine had set up, just as Swinburne's Pagan had defended all he had thrown down.

It may still be noted that the unconverted world, Puritan or Pagan, but perhaps especially when it is Puritan, has a very strange notion of the collective unity of Catholic things or thoughts. Its exponents, even when not in any rabid sense enemies, give the most curious lists of things which they think make up the Catholic life; an odd assortment of objects, such as candles, rosaries, incense (they are always intensely impressed with the enormous importance and necessity of incense), vestments, pointed windows, and then all sorts of essentials or unessentials thrown in in any sort of order; fasts, relics, penances or the Pope. But even in their bewilderment, they do bear witness to a need which is not so nonsensical as their attempts to fulfil it; the need of somehow summing up "all that sort of thing," which does really describe Catholicism and nothing else except Catholicism. It should of course be described from within, by the definition and development of its theological first principles; but that is not the sort of need I am talking about. I mean that men need an image, single, coloured and clear in outline, an image to be called up instantly in the imagination, when what is Catholic is to be distinguished from what claims to be Christian or even what in one sense is Christian. Now I can scarcely remember a time when the image of Our Lady did not stand up in my mind quite definitely, at the mention or the thought of all these things. I was quite distant from these things, and then doubtful about these things; and then disputing with the world for them, and with myself against them; for that is the condition before conversion. But whether the figure was distant, or was dark and mysterious, or was a scandal to my contemporaries, or was a challenge to myself—I never doubted that this figure was the figure of the Faith; that she embodied, as a complete human being still only human, all that this Thing had to say to humanity. The instant I remembered the Catholic Church, I remembered her; when I tried to forget the Catholic Church, I tried to forget her; when I finally saw what was nobler than my fate, the freest and the hardest of all my acts of freedom, it was in front of a gilded and very gaudy little image of her in the port of Brindisi, that I promised the thing that I would do, if I returned to my own land.

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## AN EXPLANATION & TWO CONTROVERSIES

THE last two essays in this collection have so obviously the character of newspaper correspondence, that a word must be added about the circumstances of their appearance. At the request of the B.B.C., I gave an address in their series on Freedom about the Catholic view of the matter; an address which was very much criticised; but I sometimes fancy that the most deadly criticism was involuntary and unconscious. For I could not help feeling that some of my critics must have gone to sleep, and snatched a brief respite from the recital, only to wake again with a start and all the bewilderments of nightmare, to hear the ruthless infliction still going on. I should be the last to blame them; I sometimes nearly go to sleep myself when listening to myself, let alone to anybody so remote from me as I must naturally be from them. But the actual effect, anyhow, was that most of the agonised questions which they asked me afterwards I had already answered before they were

asked. At the beginning of the whole address, I explained the beginning of the whole business; that I had been specially asked to speak as a Catholic and therefore as a controversialist. If they asked Sir Oswald Mosley to explain why he was a Fascist, it might or might not be popular; but it would be a little hard on Sir Oswald to complain that he had dragged the subject of Fascism into politics, or the subject of politics into the B.B.C. Yet to read some of the innocent criticism I have read, one would really suppose I had been asked to give a literary lecture on Milton or Shelley, and had seized the opportunity to deliver a wild eulogy upon Torquemada and Guy Fawkes. If indeed, in this free country where (I am assured) all views can be expressed, it is unpardonable to suggest that the Protestant view of Freedom is wrong, some responsibility must be shared by those who ask the Catholic to explain why the Catholic view is right. For that peculiar diplomatic and tactful art of saying that Catholicism is true, without suggesting for one moment that anti-Catholicism is false, is an art which I am too old a Rationalist to learn at my time of life.

The second legend that arose out of hearing, or not hearing, my wireless speech, was an extraordinary delusion that I made a speech about drink. Out of nineteen hundred words, the newspapers seemed to have selected three words, in the form of the polished epigram, "I like beer." Now I fear I am so constituted by cultural tradition, that I cannot for the life of me see anything more comic, or eccentric, or provocative, or sensational, about saying, "I like beer," than about saying, "I like bananas." But I do most certainly see that there would be something both egotistical and trivial about saying, "I like bananas," if it were not a part of an ordinary objective argument. And my remark was a part of an objective argument. Only I was arguing for the exact opposite of what they imagine. I said it was well to remember, to start with, that an ordinary poor man from Catholic countries would find what he regarded as ancient universal popular liberties forbidden in Protestant countries. The obvious instances are Prohibition and the veto on the Irish Sweepstake. I then said that these lighter instances were balanced indifferently for me, because "I like beer; there is nothing that bores me quite so much as horse-racing. But I have some sense of human rights." In short it is self-evident that I only said I like beer in order to show that it did not matter a curse what I liked. Yet in face of this fact, an excellent cultivated weekly paper declared that I should not like Liberty if I did not like beer. The editor handsomely admitted the fact when I drew his attention to it, and my quarrel is not here with him. But further comments were made in the matter, which are the text of one these two essays.

For the rest if any one doubts that there is such a thing as Catholic liberty, I think it can do no harm to let him realise that there is such a thing as Catholic controversy; I mean controversy between Catholics. I have, therefore, included here my reply to some frank and friendly but very definite doubts about my action, that were expressed in one of the very best of the modern Catholic papers. For I feel it would not be fair to answer somewhat controversially a criticism in an Anglican organ, while in any way concealing the fact that I have been criticised also in an organ of my own communion. It will also be clear from the context, I think, that a distinguished Italian, Dr. Crespi, who speaks specially as an opponent of Fascism, attacked me at a slightly different angle. And this alone would illustrate the main fact; that the substance of my speech was concerned with all sorts of large modern problems, and had no more to do with my taste in beer than with my familiar appearance as a fashionable figure at Ascot. I pointed out that, by limiting liberty to preaching and printing, we had given a huge advantage to cranks over common Christian people; that we had lost a peasantry and were living under a plutocracy. Indeed, some critics combined the contradictory accusations; having proved that I was wholly concentrated upon booze and betting, they rushed on to rend the sky with cries against my sweeping slanders on the Press, the Parliament, the Landlord System and the British Empire. If they will try compressing all these topics into twenty minutes, they

will understand how easy it is for the hearer (even if he manages to keep awake) to miss the proportion and the point.

### ***I. WHY PROTESTANTS PROHIBIT.***

IT is with mingled respect and regret that I differ from a paper I admire so much as I do the Catholic Herald, or a critic for whom I have so much sympathy as I have for Dr. Crespi. I have already said that the Herald is nearly the best, or the only newspaper we have; and my confidence in Dr. Crespi's sincerity is so complete that I unhesitatingly accept his assurance that he has both read and heard my address on Liberty; for without that assurance, I might be tempted now and then to think he had done neither. But this distressing exhibition of mine seems to have been such a shock to him as to leave him with a strange impression that I uttered some sort of eulogy, or at least apology, touching Italian Fascism, or more generally, the new dictatorships in Europe. Now as a fact, I was very careful to explain that I did nothing of the sort. I said of such a system that I detested some forms of it, that I did not defend any form of it; that it practically proclaimed itself a tyranny, and that I was quite ready to treat it as a tyranny. What I said was that this tyranny, even if it was a tyranny, had not in fact torn up certain traditions of popular freedom in Catholic countries, which have been, and are being, more and more ruthlessly and rapidly torn up and uprooted in Protestant countries. If I say, "Even Nero never forbade people to grow corn," I am not uttering a eulogy on Nero; and that is the sort of thing I might say about the Prohibitionists who forbade men to drink wine. But there is indeed a curious irony about my two friendly critics on this occasion. My own friendly feeling for the Herald is largely founded on the fact that it does print solid blocks of information about what wicked foreigners have to say for themselves, including Fascists and Hitlerites; so that we can judge for ourselves how wicked the foreigners are. And my unfriendly criticism of British plutocracy is largely founded on the fact that its monopolist newspapers never do this; being owned by one or two millionaires ignorant of Europe and interested only in some silly stunt or slogan. In short, I only say that if dictators suppress newspapers, newspaper proprietors suppress news. And yet I am rebuked for disliking this, even by those who avoid it.

Similarly, I warmly respect Dr. Crespi for trying to free his country from what he regards as oppression and wrong. But apparently he will not allow me to do the same thing for my country. I fear, on this point, I must be firm with him. I respectfully refuse to allow my native land to be ruined by blindness and pride and hypocrisy, and its heart eaten out by corruption and the worship of wealth; merely in order that Dr. Crespi may have a wholly imaginary England to flourish in the face of Signor Mussolini.

I need not in this space destroy the delusion in detail; because for most English economists (especially Catholics) it is already destroyed. I will only say that his paeon in praise of nineteenth-century capitalism would have been very welcome to the rich in the nineteenth century; and greatly encouraged those who laid on the millions a yoke little better than slavery. But I will give him a tip: from one who knows (I make bold to say) more about England than he does. Whenever he sees our newspapers announcing revival of trade it simply means that employers have found out how to cut down the wage bill. All recent industrial history here has been a scheme to lower wages; beginning with the triumph of the lock-out that crushed the miners, followed by vindictive laws against Labour after the general strike, and ending by taking advantage of the default on gold, to pay every workman a pound that is not a pound. That is how we do it here. I did not argue whether it is worse when done by a despot or by this anonymous conspiracy. But the tragedy (and to me despotism instead of democracy, even theoretical democracy, is a tragedy) is largely due to reaction against

commercial conspiracies. For the rest let not your Wireless Expert weep for me; or imagine that all will be bewildered who "have not the key." I happen to have stacks of letters from very poor people thanking me for pointing out how the small men are now crushed in England if they attempt independence. They are turned out of house and shop by the hundred, by modern monopolist aggression. They have the key all right; it is called in slang the key of the street. None of them has heard of the Keys of Peter; but, being poor like St. Peter, they know how poor men are goaded in the House of the Governor; and what rage rises in them against the servant of Caiaphas. They support me sufficiently, thank you, in not encouraging the Englishman to play the Pharisee.

The fact is that Protestant tyranny is totally different from Catholic tyranny; let alone Catholic liberty. It is ineradicably rooted in a totally opposite motive and moral philosophy. You seem to suggest that, where Protestant restrictions are really excessive it is but a part of the normal temptation of officials to magnify their office.

Under your favour, it is nothing of the sort. That is just the point of the whole business. Protestantism is in its nature prone to what may be called Prohibitionism. I do not mean prohibition of drink (though it happens to be a convenient comparison: that none of the ten thousand tyrants of Mediterranean history would ever have dreamed of uprooting the vine since Pentheus was torn in pieces); I mean that the Protestant tends to prohibit, rather than to curtail or control. His theory of Prohibition is rooted in his theory of progress; which began with expectation of the Millennium; but has ended in similar expectations of the Superman. I have no notion what Dr. Crespi means by my golden age: after Eden I know of no golden age in the past. But Protestant progress does imply a golden age in the future—and one utterly cut off or altered from the past. By now this Dawnism is deeply affected by Darwinism. Man is a monkey who has lost his tail and does not want it back. It is not a question of docking his tail, because it takes up too much room; or telling him to curl up his tail and only wave it on festive occasions; as in the Catholic view of discipline and recreation. No men need tails; so they need amputation.

Now the modern Protestant applies this absolute idea of amputation to all parts of problematical human nature; to all popular customs or historic traditions. He does not mean that men should be restrained in them just now; he means that men should drop them forever, like the monkey's tail. When puritans abolish ritualism, it means there shall be no more ritual. When prohibitionists abolished beer, they swore that a whole new generation would grow up and never know the taste of it. When Protestants look to the solution of Socialism, most of them do not merely mean to attack the contemporary congestion called capitalism; they mean to abolish forever the very idea of private property. Thus there is a fanatical quality, sweeping, final, almost suicidal, in Protestant reforms which there is not even in Catholic repressions. Once Puritanism pervaded America, once Prussianism pervaded Germany, there appeared a new type of law; sterilization or compulsory eugenics, from which even the dictators of the Latin tradition would shrink. There have been any number of good Catholics who might be called puritans, from Savonarola to Manning who made their little bonfires of the vanities; but they never mistook them for the everlasting bonfire.

There have been any number of bad Catholics who might be called tyrants from Borgia to Bomba, who drilled or destroyed from hate or ambition; but even when torturing men they never thought they were twisting or altering Man. Therefore their prohibitions were never so prohibitionist. Mussolini may be wrong to suppress newspapers; but who can imagine Mussolini saying, "The world will never again be cursed with printed leaves," as Jennings Bryan would say, "We shall never again be cursed with alcoholic liquor"? I think some of the recent Fascist schemes for drilling children reach the ridiculous; but they do not reach the point of saying that children

should be kept from their mothers; a point which numberless Protestant progressive followers of Wells or Shaw would reach in one wild bound. In short, apart from Catholic liberty, Catholic tyranny is either temporary in the sense of a penance or a fast, or temporary in the sense of a state of siege or a proclamation of martial law. But Protestant liberty is far more oppressive than Catholic tyranny. For Protestant liberty is only the unlimited liberty of the rich to destroy an unlimited number of the liberties of the poor.

The B.B.C., much to the credit of its own relatively sound sense of liberty, having asked me specially for what I thought about Catholicism, I did certainly divulge the secret that I thought it was true; and that, therefore, even great cultures falling away from it, in any direction, had fallen into falsehood. I fully appreciate the desire to be fair or friendly that may lead anyone to deplore this disclosure; but I do not myself believe it will do an atom of good to anyone, least of all to the English, to whitewash or conceal the bad results of heresy in history. I was, therefore, a little puzzled when a contributor called it "a sectarian note." Somehow, I had not expected anybody on the Catholic Herald to call the Catholic Church a sect.

## ***II. WHERE IS THE PARADOX?***

**A WRITER** on a High Church paper, being full of the lyric muse, recently described me as a "prolix Papist professor of paradox"; a line which it is my firm intention to extend into a poem of no less than nine verses depending upon the letter p; by which alliterative industry the unaccountable absence of any allusion to polygamous Popes, poisoning Pontiffs, piratical prelates and pestilent peasantries, will be supplied and made good at my own expense. And though the editor very gracefully apologised for having been accidentally prevented, doubtless by my prolixity, from discovering what I actually said in the passage he criticised, another critic has since then broken out on the same paper in the same literary style; and described the same statement as going "beyond such terminological inexactitude as is permissible in the most putrid paradox"; and saying I devote myself to the propaganda of the gutter. I rather wish I knew what it is that makes the most distant prospect of me (of me, a mere dot on the crowded horizon) throw an honest gentleman at the Faith House, Tufton Street, into such astonishing convulsions. It is all the more mysterious because, so far as I am concerned, it is entirely unprovoked. I have never made any particular attack on the Anglo-Catholic theory, or the Anglican Church, or upon any Anglicans, as such. I know the Anglo-Catholic theory can be honestly held; for I held it myself for many years. I have the greatest respect for those who are in such a state of conviction; as well as the greatest sympathy for those who are in any stage of doubt. I still have a large number of Anglo-Catholic friends, who do not find me so very putrid and prolix, and, though of course I differ from them, I have always rather avoided mere dispute with them; partly because there are so many things much more in need of being disputed; and partly because I know from experience that it often does more harm than good. I used to read the paper in question because it was a good paper; and until quite recently a good-humoured paper. Why so innocuous a reader should have this extraordinary effect on the other readers and writers, I do not clearly understand. But the effect is so extraordinary that the critic falls back desperately on a sort of half-defence of Puritanism, of Protestantism and of Prussianism; though these are things which all the old Anglo-Catholics used to denounce, and which I used to denounce quite as much when I was myself an Anglo-Catholic. On a former occasion, for instance, in the same strained way, it picked a particular personal quarrel with me merely because I joined with the whole civilised world in deploring the assassination of Dollfuss. If it were only a matter of personal quarrels, it would not be worth referring to again; for I am quite content with the admission already made about the facts in dispute; and all is gas and gaiters. But there are much more important quarrels, which

concern all Christendom and especially this country, about which I can hardly leave an important organ of opinion under so false an impression.

Touching Mr. C. E. Douglas, the smeller out of putrid paradoxes, I need only record that he complains of "an unhistorical use of the word Catholic," and assures us that we should be content with the fact that clergy of the national church are attached to nearly all our institutions, as a guarantee that "in theory, the Catholic religion is the official religion of the nation." I can only say that if he used his imagination about our point of view, as much as I try to use my imagination about his, it would, I think, dawn upon him that it is not altogether unreasonable in a real Catholic, or even a real Anglo-Catholic, to find this official reassurance a little thin. Certainly, in that sense, there are "Catholic" priests attached to all sorts of things; there is a "Catholic" bishop preaching that science has destroyed the whole original Christian scheme; there is a "Catholic" dean who booms Birth-Prevention like a quack medicine; there is a "Catholic" canon who is ready to "break bread" apparently with anybody from Mormons to Moslems; at least I myself should rather prefer the Moslems. But I cannot believe that either Mr. Douglas or the Editor of the paper really regards that retrospective breakfast as a substitute for the Blessed Sacrament. But though Mr. Douglas's view of our scruples is not highly sympathetic or discerning, there is one point on which Mr. Douglas endears himself to me, though I dare not hope that I am likely to endear myself to him. He may think what he likes about me, so long as he will go on thinking what he now thinks about Prussia. Because I classed Prussia with England among the Protestant countries, he protests against anything like a suggestion that they are the same sort of countries; and there I am warmly with him. They have certain negative things in common; but even in these it would be true to say that the Prussian prefers to be bullied where the Englishman only submits to be blinded. But England is a thousand times jollier and more human as a national culture than Prussia; the disease is milder and the mood more healthy. But it is a mood which is weakened by the absence of a militant creed of Christian morals, and the power to define and defend. The test could best be made by the introduction of some of the new abnormal laws already threatening the world in the name of science. Suppose something of the type of Compulsory Sterilisation or Compulsory Contraception really stalks through the modern State, leading the march of human progress through abortion to infanticide. If the heathens in North Germany received it, they would accept it with howls of barbaric joy, as one of the sacred commands of the Race Religion; the proceedings very probably terminating (by that time) with a little human sacrifice. If the English received it, they would accept it as law-abiding citizens; that is, as something between well-trained servants and bewildered children. There is a great difference; but not so great as the certainty that the Irish would not accept it at all.

Now the real reason why I have taken the text of these two High Church critics, is that their views happily cancel out upon a point of immense international importance. Mr. Douglas preserves his healthy instinct against Prussia, as being not improbably the source of Prussianism; though he might not admit my view that the error had its original source in Protestantism. But the other writer would protect Protestantism from any such criticism; and falls back on the jolly old catchword of calling Hitler a Catholic. Of course there are countless Catholics whom I think wrong in politics; and countless Catholics who think me wrong in politics. But I wonder if it is much truer to call Hitler a Catholic than to call Bertrand Russell an Anglo-Catholic. He was quite probably christened in an Anglican Church. But the much more important point is the historic and cultural origin of the whole movement of the more admittedly heathenish Hitlerism. The Anglican critic says that this tribal cult of triumph began in Bavaria. It would be as sensible to say that it began in England; because it was popularised, long before anybody had ever heard of Hitler, by Houston Stewart Chamberlain. In fact, the movement began before the Great War; before the Franco-Prussian War;



and has its origins far back in history, in the fact that the Protestant edges of Germany only partly emerged from barbarism and soon relapsed into paganism. But in its present practical form, it is simply the tail-end, we might say the rag-tag-and-bobtail of the nineteenth-century Prussianism; the camp-followers of the far better disciplined army of Bismarck. Nobody understands its very rowdy revivalism who does not understand that it is merely a revival. To suppose it began with recent headlines about Hitler is newspaper history, which is knowing no history but only news; and that frequently untrue. The movement that has actually abolished Bavaria, and left no State alive except the Bismarckian Empire, is but the last phase of the Bismarckian plan to Prussianise Germany, by crushing and outnumbering the Catholics of the Rhine; and stealing the old Imperial Crown from the other Catholics of the Danube. In short, he set up a new Protestant Empire, to dwarf and depose the old Catholic Empire; and Hitler is his heir and his executor.

These things can easily be shown to be facts, to anybody who knows anything of what happened before the newspapers of a few months ago. We need merely ask what Bavaria was like when it was Bavaria; before it felt the pressure from Prussia. When Bavaria was allowed to be Bavarian, all sorts of things were said against the Bavarians; that they were dreamy, that they were drunken, that they were ridiculously romantic, that they were mad on music, and so on. But nobody ever said that they were stiff or rigid or ruthless or inhuman or mad on mere official centralisation and militaristic discipline. That particular sort of cold brutality came from Prussian prestige; it could not possibly have come from anything else. And that Prussianism came from Protestantism; not, of course, in the sense that it came to infect all Protestants, or that there are not millions of good Protestants free from this error, or suffering from other errors. But it was a historical fruit of Protestantism; and that is not merely a historical fact; it can also be clearly traced as a philosophical truth. The racial pride of Hitlerism is of the Reformation by twenty tests; because it divides Christendom and makes all such divisions deeper; because it is fatalistic, like Calvinism, and makes superiority depend not upon choice but only on being of the chosen; because it is Caesaro-Papist, putting the State above the Church, as in the claim of Henry VIII; because it is immoral, being an innovator of morals touching things like Eugenics and Sterility; because it is subjective, in suiting the primal fact to the personal fancy, as in asking for a German God, or saying that the Catholic revelation does not suit the German temper; as if I were to say that the Solar System does not suit the Chestertonian taste. I do not apologise, therefore, for saying that this catastrophe in history has been due to heresy; and I cannot see that even an Anglo-Catholic supports his own claim to orthodoxy by denying it.

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Naturally, I have never expected that people would agree with these views. Among the remarks which I must have spoken so badly that hardly; anybody heard them, was my preliminary remark that I would very much prefer to talk to my countrymen about the things on which we should agree, about Dickens or the great comic culture of the English tradition; but that any man challenged on his allegiance to a Church must disagree with those who definitely disagree with it. I said on that occasion: "If I say these things, I cannot ask most of you to agree with me; if I did anything else, I could not ask any of you to respect me." But it does strike me, in amiable retrospect, that the whole situation is a little amusing. We live in an age in which anybody may teach anywhere, by any scientific instrument of instruction, that such a trifle as God was tossed up out of a tribal quarrel about incest or parricide, and so religion poisoned the first springs of progress; in which the Communist can claim that humanity went wrong when private property first appeared among prehistoric men; when anything, however real, in its beginning, however remoter can be

called an enormous delusion darkening the whole history of man. But when I choose to think that one island, in one corner of one continent, took the wrong turning in thought at the end of one century, hardly four hundred years ago, when I attribute to that relatively recent and local fad the collapse and despair that has actually fallen on one commercial culture, a cry of protest goes up against an intolerable blasphemy; accompanied with the assurance that those who are thus horrified have, alone among all peoples, the power to tolerate all opinions.

I confess I found a faint whiff of paradox (though by no means putrid) in the fact of these few fanatics telling me in one breath that they were devoted to liberty of thought and that I had disgraced myself by saying what I thought so plainly. But they were only a few; and I ought not to close this episode without bearing testimony to the vast number of messages I received from Protestants, or even from Pagans, quite fairly recognising or quite fairly discussing, what I had really said. Above all, I know well that I could have proved my case, more clearly than appears in this hasty correspondence, if I had merely printed a correspondence far more valuable; the letters I received from very poor people, who had suffered the silent aggression and enslavement by modern monopoly; and who thanked me with only too much of the truly English generosity, for exposing the wrongs they endure with only too much of the truly English good humour.