

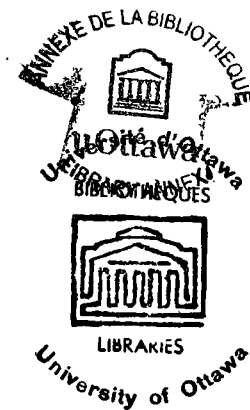
## DIDACTICISM IN THE FATHER BROWN STORIES OF CHESTERTON

by Sister St. William Marie

Congrégation de Notre Dame

[ie Gertrude  
Mcneaguer]

Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of Arts of  
the University of Ottawa as partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



Degree conferred  
May 8, 1956  
*[Signature]*

Montreal, Quebec, 1956.

UMI Number: EC55876

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI<sup>®</sup>**

---

UMI Microform EC55876  
Copyright 2011 by ProQuest LLC  
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against  
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

---

ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This thesis was prepared under the direction of Dr. Emmett O'Grady, Chairman of the Department of English Literature at the University of Ottawa.

Gratitude is expressed to the librarians of the University of Ottawa Library, Carnegie Library, and Westmount Library, for their unfailing courtesy and generous assistance.

CURRICULUM STUDIORUM

Sister St. William Marie (Gertrude Meagher)  
received a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Marianopolis  
College, 1946, and a Bachelor of Education Degree  
from the University of Montreal, 1947.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	vi
I.- TRADITION OF THE DETECTIVE STORY . . . . .	I
II.- ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN STORIES. . . . .	8
III.- ANALYSIS OF THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN STORIES . . . . .	29
IV.- ANALYSIS OF THE INCREDULITY OF FATHER BROWN STORIES . . . . .	46
V.- ANALYSIS OF THE SECRET OF FATHER BROWN STORIES . . . . .	57
VI.- ANALYSIS OF THE SCANDAL OF FATHER BROWN STORIES . . . . .	67
CONCLUSION . . . . .	79
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	84
ABSTRACT . . . . .	87

EPIGRAPH

"These monsters are meant for the gargoyles of a definite cathedral. I have to carve the gargoyles, because I can carve nothing else; I leave to others the angels and the arches and the spires. But I am very sure of the style of the architecture and of the consecration of the church."

G. K. Chesterton, From the essay On Gargoyles.

## INTRODUCTION

-Gilbert Keith Chesterton, one of the outstanding personalities in England, died in 1936 after a brief illness. From his facile pen had poured a continuous stream of delightfully clever essays, felicitous verse, and intriguing fiction. Fourteen years previously, in being received into the Catholic Church, he had taken a step which was of tremendous importance to him and to Catholics, not only of his own country but of the whole world. It is true that for a long time he had been writing in defense of Catholic doctrine; but by the fact of his formal submission to the Church he had publicly allied himself with and become as it were the spokesman for several million co-religionists. To his words was now added a greater weight of authority because of his avowed affiliation with the Church of Rome.

However, it has been well said that Chesterton was a true missionary, because it was not for the instruction of those who came to fill the pews that he preached but for those who had to be sought far and wide; he was after the stray sheep - all those who did not share the Catholic Faith with him.<sup>1</sup>

Among these were many of his own intellectual world who believed that scientific progress contained the answers to

---

<sup>1</sup> Emile Cammaerts, The Laughing Prophet, London, Methuen & Company, 1937, p. 52.

## INTRODUCTION

all the problems of the day; then there were others also who, unable to find any comfort in the contemporary pseudo-scientific philosophy, and having no supporting belief in God, were filled with a gloomy pessimism. Pre-eminently a teacher, he spent his time and talent with almost unbelievable prodigality to make known the Catholic philosophy of life. In an essay on Carlyle which he wrote when he was a young man he says: "There are two main moral necessities for the work of a great man: the first is that he should believe in the truth of his message; the second is that he should believe in the acceptability of his message."<sup>2</sup>

The work of G. K. Chesterton evidenced both of these requisites: so firmly did he believe that his message was true, and so certain was he that it would be acceptable that he made use of every possible vehicle to transmit it. Journalist as he was proud and happy to call himself, the personal essay was the medium commonly employed by him; but books like Orthodoxy, novels such as The Flying Inn, even mystery stories such as The Blue Cross, all were made to serve his purpose - and that purpose was to teach the fundamental truths of Christianity.

Because what he had to say was so unutterably serious,

---

<sup>2</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Varied Types, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1909, p. 109.

## INTRODUCTION

concerned as it was with Man's ultimate salvation, he found it necessary to lighten the burden of it, both for himself and the reader by those delightful flashes of wit, humour and satire which do not in any way detract from his message, but serve only to make it stand out more clearly and unmistakably. As one of his contemporaries wrote of him:

Knight of the Holy Ghost, he goes his way  
Wisdom his motley, Truth his loving jest;  
The mills of Satan keep his lance in play,  
Pity and innocence his heart at rest.<sup>3</sup>

There has been much written on G.K. Chesterton; his views on education, his message, his poetry, his role of Christian crusader, his philosophy, have all been discussed. But a study of his detective stories to show that they can legitimately be interpreted as doing more than merely entertain has not yet been done. It is the purpose of this thesis to do that. We shall clarify and state this purpose more fully in Chapter I where we believe it more logically belongs.

---

<sup>3</sup> Walter de la Mare, Prose and Poetry of England, Syracuse, New York, The L.W. Singer Co., Inc., 1949, p. 692.

## CHAPTER ONE

## TRADITION OF THE DETECTIVE STORY

Because man is not omniscient he is sometimes an actor in a drama the significance of which is not always clear to him; or again, he is part of an audience awaiting with excitement and interest the dénouement which must inevitably evolve to explain to him one more mysterious happening in the tragedy or comedy of daily living. Because he has been forever confronted with strange and apparently inexplicable events, it seems only natural and reasonable that the mystery or detective story should have had its origin almost with the origin of man himself. In the Old Testament one reads the animated account of Daniel's cross-examination of the witnesses who accused the virtuous and lovely Suzannah; here, too, one finds the intriguing narrative of the priests of Bel and the incriminating footprints, the discovery of which led to the disclosure of their naive trickery.<sup>1</sup> The blind Isaac, suspecting that he is being made the victim of a deception and exclaiming, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau," furnishes another example of detection.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Sayers, Introduction to Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror, London, Gallancz, in The Art of the Mystery Story, Howard Hayward, p. 102.

## TRADITION OF THE DETECTIVE STORY

2

In much of the early folklore, especially that of Gaelic origin, one finds the magic and mystery element quite strongly developed. However, in succeeding generations, indeed until the middle of the last century, all attempts to recount tales of this type were in general spasmodic. To discover the reason for this presents little difficulty. In the case of the straight mystery story in which a series of events is palpably magic and inexplicable except in terms of the supernatural, this type could appeal only to a limited reading public. In the detective tale, the characters must of necessity play their parts against the backdrop of definite morality safeguarded by respect for an organized police-force; and prior to the early nineteen hundreds no such useful body existed.

But we might almost say that with its inception stories of those who guard and those who break the law were practically inevitable. Writing about this very point G. K. Chesterton says:

A rude popular literature of the romantic possibilities of the modern city was bound to arise. It has arisen in the popular detective stories, as rough and refreshing as the ballads of Robin Hood ..... While it is the constant tendency of the Old Adam to rebel against so universal and automatic a thing as civilization, to preach departure and rebellion, the the romance of the police activity keeps in some sense before the mind the fact that civilization itself is the most sensational of departures, and the most romantic of rebellions. The romance of the police

## TRADITION OF THE DETECTIVE STORY

3

force is based on the fact that morality is the most daring of conspiracies. It reminds one that the whole noiseless and unnoticed police management by which we are ruled and protected is only a successful knight-errantry.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps this is somewhat glamorous, somewhat romantic. Nevertheless, it is certain that in an age when flogging, torture, and capital punishment were summarily administered upon the flimsiest circumstantial evidence, there was no place for detective fiction; but with the creation of an organized body to protect not only the law but also the rights of the common man there also came the detective tale.

To Edgar Allan Poe goes the honour and the title of Father of the Detective Story. Between 1840 and 1845 he published five tales, ranging all the way from the purely sensational and romantic Murders in the Rue Morgue, to the purely intellectual and classic Gold Bug. Somewhat later James Fenimore Cooper's Indian trail stories, Mrs. Henry Wood's East Lynne, and Wilkie Collins' Moonstone and Woman in White attracted laudatory attention. However, it was left to Arthur Conan Doyle, using the Poe formula, but introducing more action while cutting down on the psychological discussion, to drop a bombshell upon the English world with his creation

---

<sup>2</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Defendant, London, J.M. Dent & Co., 1907. (Third Edition), p. 122.

## -TRADITION OF THE DETECTIVE STORY

4

of the inimitable Sherlock Holmes, who was destined to become the most famous detective in fiction. That clever amateur sleuth first made his appearance in Study in Scarlet, published in 1887, and his popularity continued well into the twentieth century helped along greatly by motion-picture and radio.

To the current century also belong such outstanding names in the field of detective fiction as Carolyn Wells, E.C. Bentley, Dorothy Sayers, R. Austin Freeman, A.E.W. Mason, Somerset Maugham, A.A. Milne, Father Ronald Knox, and G.K. Chesterton. Most, if not all, of these authors are writers of high scholarship who offer no excuses for sometimes using this vehicle of expression. To quote from the last mentioned,

Not only is the good detective story a perfectly legitimate form of art, but it has a certain definite and real advantage as an agent of the public weal. The first essential value of the modern detective story lies in this that it is the earliest and only form of popular literature which, amid a babble of preciosity and pedantry, declines to regard the present as prosaic or the common man as commonplace.<sup>3</sup>

That modern mystery fiction has a vast reading public especially among the intellectuals of the twentieth century has been attested to by many of these same intellectuals.

---

<sup>3</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Defendant, London, J.M. Dent & Co., 1907, (Third Edition), p. 119.

## TRADITION OF THE DETECTIVE STORY

5

One of their number, an American woman college professor, claims that the detective story has made a unique contribution to contemporary ethics.

"...I suggested that our revolt was from a smart and easy pessimism, which interprets the universe in terms of relativity and purposelessness, our return to an older and more primitive conception of the cosmic order. Here lies, I believe, the truly unique contribution of the detective story to contemporary ethics. With the engaging paradox of the old lady in Punch, who sought through shelves of psychological novels for a 'nice love story without any sex,' we weary academicians seek refreshment in a highly moral murder. Perhaps we are protesting against a conception of the universe as governed - if governed at all - by haphazard circumstances; against a conception of men and women as purposeless, aimless, impotent; against a theory of a world wandering, devoid of purpose and meaning, in unlimited space. In our detective stories we find relief in a return to an older ethics and metaphysics; an Hebraic insistence on justice as a measure of all things - an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; a Greek feeling of inevitability, for man as the victim of circumstances and fate, to be sure, but a fate brought on by his own carelessness, his own ignorance, his own choice... last of all, a scientific insistence, upon the inevitable operation of cause and effect. For never, in the just world of the detective story, does the murderer go undetected; never does justice fail in the end ... Perhaps it is for this reason that the most persistent readers of detective literature today are the scientists and the philosophers who were bred under the older system of belief. It may be that their revolt from a changing universe without standard and without order, is a return to a simpler causality under which they are more at home."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Marjorie Nicholson, Atlantic Monthly, April 1929, in The Art of the Mystery Story, Howard Haycraft.

## TRADITION OF THE DETECTIVE STORY

6

Now in the mystery stories of at least one great English author one finds not only that over-all moral tone praised by the writer who has been quoted above, but in many of his detective tales G.K. Chesterton makes a clear and emphatic statement of a point of morals. That the object of the detective story is to mystify, that it must pose a problem which the reader is invited to solve, and that any tale which does not satisfy these basic requirements cannot be said to belong to this literary genre - all this is reasonable and true. But to say that the story must go no further, that there must be nothing in it even faintly indicative of didacticism, that it must simply entertain and no more; that any attempt on the part of the author to make it do more than this, lessens its entertainment value, is a statement open to discussion, intriguing, but not pertinent here.

It is the purpose of this thesis to show that the mystery stories of G.K. Chesterton have a value over and above that of entertainment. Indirectly, subtly they too preach the fundamental truths found in his non-fiction prose and poetry. Any examination of G.K. Chesterton's non-fictional works to show their teaching value would obviously be superfluous. He was the spokesman for Catholic doctrine and the Catholic Church even before his formal reception into that Church, and evaluation of his work as such has been most ably

## TRADITION OF THE DETECTIVE STORY

7

given by many of his contemporaries such as Hilaire Belloc, Emile Cammaerts, and Monsignor O'Connor. But his mystery and detective fiction, where this didacticism is more indirect and less obvious, and probably less deliberately propagandist, seems to warrant an analysis for the purpose of showing that even in this type of literary work G.K. Chesterton is the teacher. In an essay that he wrote in America, 1929 he said,

"Personally I am all for propaganda, and a great deal of what I write is deliberately propagandist. But even when it is not in the least propagandist, it will probably be full of implications of my own religion, because that is what is meant by having a religion."

To a man such as Chesterton it would have been next to impossible to keep out of his fiction a little moralizing which no doubt annoys that kind of reader who refuses to think of every man as an important personality made to the image and likeness of God - created to enjoy the vision of God in eternity. But to the great majority, the statement of a moral truth does not spoil the story but only makes the reader conscious of the fact that this is Chesterton - and Chesterton is synonymous with teacher.

## CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

Someone, describing the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages, has said that the laughing faces of gargoyles look inward toward the altar and God, while the frowning faces are turned outwards, their glances directed towards the world and sinners. G. K. Chesterton's mystery stories, like the gargoyles, have this dual vision: there is in them a preoccupation with man and his sins, but there is, too, the smiling upward glance towards the all just, but all merciful and omnipotent God.

Chesterton was one who was perpetually startled by the wonder of being; the sight of a wooden post, of a dandelion, of a blade of grass, of a child, could bring God to him, and his adoration took the form of gratitude because he found the world good. But nevertheless, he was almost terribly concerned with the fact of the existence of evil, which even in his boyhood he felt to be palpably real. He bears witness to this in his Autobiography when he says,

I am not impressed very seriously by those who call Confession cowardly; for I gravely doubt whether they themselves would have the courage to go through with it. But when they say, 'Evil is only relative. Sin is only negative. There is no positive badness; it is only the absence of positive goodness' - then I know they are talking shallow balderdash only because they are much better than I; more innocent, more

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

9

normal and more near to God.<sup>1</sup>

And again he says,

When people ask me, or indeed anybody else, 'Why did you join the Church of Rome?' the first essential answer, if it is partly an elliptical answer, is, 'To get rid of my sins.' For there is no other religious system that does really profess to get rid of people's sins.<sup>2</sup>

That good was positive he firmly believed but so too was evil, and as such it was a force to be reckoned with.

It was Father John O'Connor, the chief instrument of the Holy Spirit in his conversion to the Catholic Church, who all unwittingly gave Chesterton the idea for the Father Brown stories. Concerning this he says,

That the Catholic Church knew more about good than I did was very easy to believe. That she knew more about evil than I did seemed incredible.<sup>3</sup>

And

There sprang up in my mind the vague idea of making some artistic use of these comic yet tragic cross-purposes; and constructing a comedy in which a priest should appear to know nothing and in fact know more about crime than the criminals. ... I permitted myself the grave liberty of taking my friend, and knocking him about; beating his hat and umbrella shapeless, untidying his clothes, punching his intelligent countenance into a con-

---

1 G. K. Chesterton, Autobiography, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1936, p. 76.

2 Ibid. p. 340.

3. Ibid.

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

10

dition of pudding-faced fatuity, and generally disguising Father O'Connor as Father Brown.<sup>4</sup>

But the comedies are not wholly comical. And just as the seeming innuous fatuity of the little priest obscures his very fine intelligence, so too does the apparent inanity of these stories hide from the superficial reader the wisdom and the moral teaching which are really there.

The first of all the Father Brown stories was The Blue Cross which later made its appearance in a group published under the title of The Innocence of Father Brown. This was followed in turn by The Wisdom of Father Brown, The Incredulity of Father Brown, The Secret of Father Brown, and The Scandal of Father Brown. All of these at a later date were collected under the title of The Father Brown Omnibus and Father Brown Stories. It is the last mentioned edition which will be referred to throughout this thesis. The central figure in each study is of course the ubiquitous, often bewilderingly ingenious, but always delightful diminutive clergyman.

It does not come within the scope of this thesis to establish whether or not these stories fulfill all the requirements of the best detective fiction. However it is of interest to note that Ellery Queen, himself a master of this literary genre, includes the Father Brown Stories among the

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 339.

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

11

pure detection type, which type he says is amazingly small.<sup>5</sup>

And T. S. Eliot writes,

When I am considering Religion and Literature I speak of these things only to make clear that I am not concerned primarily with the Religious Literature. I am concerned with what should be the relation between Religion and Literature. Therefore the third type of 'religious literature' may be more quickly passed over. I mean the literature of men who are sincerely desirous of forwarding the cause of religion: that which may come under the heading of Propaganda. I am thinking of course of such delightful fiction as Chesterton's Man Who Was Thursday, or his Father Brown, No one admires and enjoys these things more than I do; I would only remark that when the same thing is aimed at by zealous persons of less talent than Chesterton the effect is negative.<sup>6</sup>

That these tales do present the reader with a problem to be solved is undeniable; that the purpose of entertainment is achieved as the plot evolves is also incontestable; but that there is more than mere entertainment, more than an avenue of escape provided, that the reader can find in these narratives any of those thought-provoking statements which are so abundant in Chesterton's other prose works is not always so apparent. It is to show the wisdom and moral teaching which are present in many of them that an analysis of the stories will be made.

---

<sup>5</sup> Saturday Review, Nov. 22, 1941. p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> T.S. Eliot, Selected Prose, ed. John Hayward, London, Penguin Book Ltd., 1953, p. 35.

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

12

There are twelve stories in this first series which was published under the title of The Wisdom of Father Brown, in 1911. Three of them are concerned with the unlawful business, always cleverly planned, of that six-foot arch-criminal Flambeau. In the first of these, The Blue Cross, Father Brown makes his début on the literary stage where he is recognized as a new type of sleuth who solves every crime by the intuitive method alone.

The story centers round the attempted theft of a reliquary "set with blue stones" by the daring Flambeau. Cleverly disguised as a fellow-priest, he has succeeded in luring the apparently unsuspecting Father Brown, the custodian of the sacred treasure, to a remote spot on the open moor. Then Flambeau, somewhat unwarily voices some of his "theological" opinions belittling reason and its place in religion.

'No,' said the priest, 'reason is always reasonable, even in the last limbo, in the lost borderland of things. I know that people charge the Church with lowering reason, but it is just the other way. Alone on earth the Church affirms that God Himself is bound by reason.'<sup>7</sup>

And a little later,

Reason and justice grip the remotest and loneliest star. Look at those stars. Don't they look

---

7 G.K. Chesterton, The Blue Cross, in The Innocence of Father Brown, Cassell and Company, Ltd., London, p. 20.

as if they were single diamonds and sapphires? Well, you can imagine any mad botany or geology you please. Think of forests of adamant with leaves of brilliants. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don't fancy that all that frantic astronomy would make the smallest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal, under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a notice-board, 'Thou shalt not steal.'<sup>8</sup>

Through Father Brown, Chesterton the apologist defends the teaching of the Church long before his reception into the Church; while Chesterton the moralist upholds the law of God. The teacher Chesterton makes use of an entertaining medium through which to spread knowledge. He wrote once

I have never understood, from that day to this ... why a solid argument is any less solid because you make the illustrations as entertaining as you can.

... If you say that two sheep added to two sheep make four sheep your audience will accept it patiently - like sheep. But if you say it of two monkeys, or two kangaroos, or two sea-griffins, people will refuse to believe that two and two make four. They seem to imagine that you have made up the arithmetic, just as you have made up the illustration of the arithmetic. And though they would actually know that what you say is sense, if they thought about it sensibly, they cannot believe that anything decorated by an incidental joke can be sensible. Perhaps it explains why so many successful men are dull - or why so many dull men are successful.<sup>9</sup>

The emphasis in this story is on the fact that the little country priest is really more conscious of the existence of real evil than is the seasoned robber. But that is at one

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Autobiography, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1936, p. 170.

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES 14

and the same time its tragedy and comedy. Here is a man whose whole life is dedicated to doing the will of God, which dedication must necessarily imply the avoidance of all sin, and because of that power which flows through him from his ordination to the priesthood he must take upon himself the crushing weight of the sins of his fellow-men. That is one paradox that Chesterton did not make; but he was quick to recognize it and to use it.

When the would-be thief realizes that he has been outwitted by the little priest, and asks how Father Brown can possibly know all the tricks of the criminal's trade, he receives the answer,

Oh, by being a celibate simpleton, I suppose. Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil? But as a matter of fact, another part of my trade made me sure that you weren't a priest. You attacked reason. It's bad theology.<sup>10</sup>

In The Flying Stars, Flambeau has succeeded in stealing the diamonds destined for a young girl's Christmas gift from her godfather. The thief to all intents and purposes vanishes but is discovered by Father Brown among the huge branches of a tree in the park. The priest directs his voice upward,

I want you to give them back, Flambeau, and I want you to give up this life. There is still youth and honour and humour in you; don't fancy

---

10 Ibid. p. 23.

that they will last in that trade. Men may keep a sort of level of good, but no man has ever been able to keep on one level of evil. The road goes down and down. The kind man drinks, and turns cruel; the frank man kills, and lies about it. Many a man I know started like you to be an honest outlaw, a merry robber of the rich, and ended stamped in slime. Maurice Blum started out as an anarchist of principle, a father of the poor; he ended a greasy tale-bearer and spy, that both sides used and despised ... I know the woods look very free behind you, Flambeau. I know that in a flash you could melt into them like a monkey. But some day you will be an old grey monkey, Flambeau. You will sit up in your free forest cold at heart and close to death, and the tree-tops will be very bare.<sup>11</sup>

Chesterton loved his fellow men. Especially he loved the sinners and the apparent failures. In an essay on Shaw he says that what Mr. Shaw cannot understand is that the thing which is valuable and lovable is man - the old, beer-drinking, creed-making, fighting, failing, sensual, respectable man.<sup>12</sup> Gilbert Chesterton did comprehend the value of a man and of that man's soul, too; and Father Brown's concern for the return of the diamonds is not only that restitution be made and another man's good name vindicated, but that the thief should repent.

In The Queer Feet, once more Flambeau appears on the scene. This time he has contrived to carry off the beautiful silver fish knives and forks from the ceremonial dinner-table

---

<sup>11</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Flying Stars in The Innocence of Father Brown, Cassell and Company, Ltd., London, p. 63-64.

<sup>12</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Heretics, London, John Lane, 1912, p. 67.

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

16

of the Club of the Twelve True Fishermen. Father Brown, for once appears to have a legitimate reason for being where he is, having been called in by the Jewish proprietor of the fashionable hotel to prepare for death an Italian waiter who has been suddenly stricken. Because of his acute hearing coupled with his clever deductions the priest has knowledge of the theft before the victims are aware of their loss. Flambeau, faced with his guilt says to him, "Stand still, I don't want to threaten you, but ....."

"I do want to threaten you", said Father Brown, "with the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched."<sup>13</sup> And then he suggests somewhat bluntly that Flambeau make his confession.

Now indeed, this is not the kind of dialogue that is found in the usual detective tale. To be confronted with an unequivocal statement of the fact of hell - of everlasting punishment for grave sin - in the midst of what is apparently intended solely for light entertainment is obviously somewhat startling, and the squeamish reader may object to it. That it is salutary cannot be denied. Later when the priest restores their property to the Fishermen and one of them asks the name of the culprit, Father Brown says,

---

<sup>13</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Queer Feet, in The Innocence of Father Brown, Cassell and Company, Ltd., London, p. 45.

'I don't know his real name, but I know something of his fighting weight, and a great deal about his spiritual difficulties. I formed the physical estimate when he was trying to throttle me, and the moral estimate when he repented.'

'Oh, I say - repented!' cried young Chester with a sort of crow of laughter.

Father Brown got to his feet, putting his hands behind him. 'Odd, isn't it,' he said, 'that a thief and a vagabond should repent, when so many who are rich and secure should remain hard and frivolous, and without fruit for God or man? If you doubt the penitence as a practical fact, there are your knives and forks. You are the Twelve True Fishers but He has made me a fisher of men.'

'Did you catch this man?' asked the colonel frowning. Father Brown looked him full in his frowning face. 'Yes,' he said, 'I caught him with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world and still bring him back with a twitch upon the thread.'<sup>14</sup>

Twice in the course of this story is the sacrament of penance mentioned; the dying waiter confesses his sins in order to prepare for death; the thief repents, confesses and makes restitution. Chesterton was very conscious of the thrilling wonder of the sacrament of penance which he says gives a new life and reconciles a man to all living; but it does not do this as the hedonists and the heathen preachers of happiness do it. A price must be paid, and that price is Truth which is Reality.<sup>15</sup>

One is happy to learn that Flambeau does completely reform and is encountered throughout many subsequent stories

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Autobiography, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1936, p. 76.

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

18

as a respectable private detective. In a later series he gives the reason for his permanent conversion:

'There is nothing mystical or metaphysical or vicarious about my confession', said Flambeau. 'I stole for twenty years with these two hands; I fled from the police on these two feet. I hope that you will admit that my activities were practical. I hope that you will admit that my judges and pursuers really had to deal with crime. Do you think that I do not know all about their way of reprehending it? Have I not heard the sermons of the righteous and seen the cold stares of the respectable? Have I not been lectured in the lofty and distant style, asked how it was possible for anyone to fall so low, told that no decent person could ever have dreamed of such depravity? Do you think that all that ever did anything but make me laugh? Only my friend told me that he knew exactly why I stole, and I have never stolen since.'<sup>16</sup>

Father Brown knows why Flambeau stole because he knows as we do that life is a battle and each of us must be perpetually choosing, because we are free, either to overcome temptation or to be vanquished by it.

The next three stories to be considered deal with murder. The setting of The Wrong Shape is a quaint and picturesque English country house incongruously complete with Hindu servant, and a curved dagger found lying in the shrubbery. But the murderer is proved by Father Brown to be the highly respectable family physician who firmly believes in Nature and natural instincts whether men call them moral or immoral.

---

<sup>16</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Secret of Flambeau in The Father Brown Stories, London, Cassell and Company, 1947, p. 588.

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

19

In the confession which he writes out for the priest's benefit he says,

'I believed that to be a good animal was to be the best thing in the world. I believed in Nature; but it seems as if Nature could betray a man. ... I loved Quinton's wife. What was there wrong with that? Nature told me to, and it's love that makes the world go round. According to my own creed I was quite free to kill Quinton, which was the best thing for everybody, even himself. But as a healthy animal I had no notion of killing myself. I resolved therefore, that I would never do it until I saw a chance that would leave me scot free. I saw that chance this morning.

... When I had done it the extraordinary thing happened. Nature deserted me. I felt ill. I felt just as if I had done something wrong. I think my brain is breaking up; I feel some sort of desperate pleasure in thinking that I have told the thing to somebody; that I shall not have to be alone with it if I marry and have children. What is the matter with me? Madness - or can one have remorse just as if one were in one of Byron's poems?<sup>17</sup>

The confession of the doctor corroborates the fact of the existence of a natural moral law which forbids murder, and that the breaking of the law even though one denies its existence brings with it a sense of remorse which is indeed a sense of sin. Chesterton believes that the only objection to natural religion is that somehow it always becomes unnatural; that a man may love nature in the morning for her innocence and amiability and at nightfall he finds himself loving her for her darkness and cruelty. Physical nature,

---

<sup>17</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Wrong Shape in The Father Brown Stories, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 101.

he says, must not be made the direct object of obedience; it must be engaged, not worshipped as a god.<sup>18</sup>

An apparent accident in an elevator shaft which results in the violent death of a public stenographer supplies the plot of The Eye of Apollo. The murderer is found to be the New Priest of Apollo, about whose religion Flambeau remarks to Father Brown,

'One of those new religions that forgives your sins by saying that you never had any. It claims of course, that it can cure all physical diseases.'

'Can it cure the one spiritual disease?' asked Father Brown with a serious curiosity.

'And what's the one spiritual disease?' asked Flambeau smiling.

'Oh, thinking one is quite well,' said his friend.<sup>19</sup>

Is not the moral disease of the modern world, of Chesterton's world as well as our own, a world sick unto death, but so sadly unaware of its own misery and danger because it has lost its sense of sin. Fulton Sheen says that prosperity killed the sense of evil at the beginning of the century as the intelligentsia argued that there was no real difference between good and evil; it depended entirely on the individual point of view.<sup>20</sup> "An imbecile habit has arisen in modern controversy of saying that such and such a creed can be held in

---

<sup>18</sup> G.K. Chesterton, quoted by Raymond Bond in The Man Who Was Chesterton, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1937, p.438.

<sup>19</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Eye of Apollo in The Father Brown Stories, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 132.

<sup>20</sup> Fulton J. Sheen, Philosophy of Religion, New York, Appelton-Century-Crofts, 1948, p. 358.

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

21

one age and not in another," says Chesterton. He believes that to say that a dogma was credible in the twelfth century but not now is just as ridiculous as to say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Tuesdays but not on Mondays.<sup>21</sup> In his autobiography he says that even though he passed through a sceptical stage of life he never indulged in the current arguments about the relativity of evil or the unreality of sin; he had discovered the devil in his youth and always afterwards he could recognize his works.<sup>22</sup>

The Hammer of God is a somewhat dispassionate account of the murder of the disreputable scapegrace, Colonel Bohun, whose brother is curate of the beautiful Gothic cathedral. The body has been found quite near the church, the skull having been crushed in by the blow of a hammer apparently wielded by a powerful man. When an attempt to fasten the guilt of the crime on the Calvinistic blacksmith fails, Father Brown suggests to the minister that they go into the church to get away from the gruesome spectacle.

Leading the way himself, the Reverend Wilfred Bohun points out the beauties of the lovely Gothic edifice,

---

<sup>21</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy, London, John Lane, 1908, p. 133-134.

<sup>22</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Autobiography, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1936, p. 89.

ANALYSIS OF THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

22

especially the wonderful angel window in the gallery where it is his custom to pray. However, in the midst of his observations, the priest finds a stairway which leads up as well as down. He immediately begins to ascend, calling to the other to follow him into the clear fresh air.

When the two are standing upon a kind of parapet from which all the surrounding country-side can be seen, everything so reduced in size as to appear pygmy, Father Brown speaks,

'I think that there is something dangerous about standing in these high places to pray. Heights were meant to be looked at, not to be looked from.'

'Do you mean that one may fall over?' asked Wilfred.

'I mean that one's soul may fall if one's body doesn't,' said the other priest.

'I scarcely understand you,' remarked Bohun indistinctly.

'Look at that blacksmith, for instance,' went on Father Brown calmly; 'a good man, but not a Christian --- hard, imperious, unforgiving. Well, his religion was made by men who prayed on hills and crags, and learned to look down on the world more than to look up to heaven. Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak.'

'But, he -- he didn't do it,' said Bohun tremulously.

'No,' said the other in an odd voice, 'we know that he didn't do it.'

After a moment he resumed, looking tranquilly out over the plain with his pale gray eyes, 'I knew a man once,' he said, 'who began worshipping with others before the altar, but who grew fond of high and lonely places to pray from, corners or niches in the belfry or the spire. And once in one of those dizzy places where the whole world seemed to turn under him like a wheel, his brain turned also and he fancied he was God. So that

though he was a good man, he committed a great crime. He thought that it was given to him to judge the world and strike down the sinner. He would never have had such a thought if he had been kneeling with other men upon a floor. But he saw all men walking about as insects. He saw one especially strutting just below him, insolent, and evident by a bright green hat - a poisonous insect.'

Rooks cawed round the belfry; but there was no other sound till Father Brown went on: 'This also tempted him that he had in his hand one of the most awful engines of nature: I mean gravitation, that mad and quickening rush by which all nature's creatures fly back to her heart when released. See, the Inspector is strutting just below us in the smithy. If I were to toss a pebble over this parapet it would be something like a bullet by the time it struck him. If I were to drop a hammer - even a small hammer -'

Wilfred Bohun threw one leg over the parapet, and Father Brown had him in a minute by the collar. 'Not by that door,' he said quite gently, 'that door leads to hell.'

Bohun staggered back against the wall, and stared at him with frightful eyes. 'How do you know all this?' he cried. 'Are you a devil?'

'I am a man,' answered Brown gravely, 'and therefore have all devils in my heart.'<sup>23</sup>

One of his critics claims that Chesterton's novels all "suffer from the taint of allegory", which statement he says may be regarded "as a compliment in disguise".<sup>24</sup> While the novels are not under consideration here, nevertheless it does seem reasonable to consider The Hammer of God as allegorical at

---

<sup>23</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Hammer of God in The Father Brown Stories, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 129-130.

<sup>24</sup> Gerald Bullet, The Innocence of G.K. Chesterton, London, Cecil Palmer, 1923, p. 150.

the same time that we make it clear that we find nothing derogatory in that qualifying adjective. The parable was one of the tools of which Christ Our Lord made use to carve out the Kingdom of God on earth. A teacher like Chesterton could not err in following the Master's example for the same purpose even though in a less perfect manner.

A man is always in spiritual danger when, from the lofty height of his own self importance he looks down upon his more sinful brethren. He loses his perspective, he loses the consciousness of his own creatureliness. In an essay on humility, G.K. Chesterton says that although looking down on things may be a delightful experience, still nothing, from a mountain to a cabbage is really seen when viewed from an aeroplane; that everything that is looked at by the philosopher of the ego from his rarified heights is foreshortened and deformed. He says that if a man really wishes to see truly he must divest himself for a time of those peculiarities that separate him from the object he studies.<sup>25</sup> Wilfred Bohun sees his brother's glaring sins and detests them but never for a moment does he identify himself with his fellow-sinner.

Somewhat of that happy surprise which accompanies the

---

<sup>25</sup> G.K. Chesterton, A Defense of Humility in The Defendant, London, J.M. Dent & Co., 1907, p. 101.

unexpected meeting with a loved friend was ours when we stumbled upon this passage in a book which is recognized as containing solid spiritual food:

It is when we sincerely cry out each morning: 'O Lord do not leave me to myself today, or I am sure to betray Thee', that we can have confidence of receiving divinely given strength. Thus our very weakness becomes a source of strength, so that humility, which is nothing but the practical acknowledgement of our utter dependence on God, becomes the surety of our success. This, presumably, was what was in Chesterton's mind when he wrote that 'humility is the mother of giants'; and he went on to add: 'One sees great things from the valley, but only small things from the peak.'<sup>26</sup>

A murder mystery that supplies the reader with all the thrills consonant with its type but still provides matter for prayerful meditation must be acknowledged to be quite different from the run-of-the-mill "whodunnit".

Neither murder nor theft is the crime in The Three Tools of Death. The body of Sir Aaron Armstrong, an over cheerful philanthropist and after dinner speaker, has been discovered on the grassy mound near his home. Apparently he has been thrown from an upper window and has died instantly. It is Father Brown who arrives at the truth that Armstrong was a suicidal maniac. The police-inspector finds it difficult to reconcile suicide with the apparent gaiety of the man.

---

<sup>26</sup> Basil Hemphill, O.S.B., The Joy of Serving God, London, Herder Book Co., 1951, p. 51.

'What?' cried Merton in an incredulous tone.  
 'And the Religion of Cheerfulness --'  
 'It is a cruel religion,' said the priest,  
 looking out of the window. 'Why couldn't they  
 let him weep a little, like his fathers before  
 him? His plans stiffened, his great views grew  
 cold; behind that merry mask was the empty mind  
 of the atheist.'<sup>27</sup>

In another and later story Chesterton speaks of atheism as  
 the maze without a center which all men fear.<sup>28</sup>

In The Invisible Man Gilbert Chesterton makes use of  
 an idea which evidently intrigued him because he employs it  
 several times. Isidore Smythe, alone in his apartment the  
 entrance to which is guarded by four men, has evidently been  
 murdered and the body removed. Each of the four insists that  
 no one had entered or left the building. But Father Brown,  
 who has encountered a postman in the vicinity, picks him out  
 as the murderer. He is the morally invisible man whom the  
 watchers have not seen because familiarity which breeds con-  
 tempt when applied to a fellow being can rob him of all per-  
 sonality. The postman was just a postman; he was not thought  
 of as a man with passions like his fellows; but he was the  
 murderer. "Nobody ever notices postmen," says Father Brown,  
 "Yet they have passions like other men."<sup>29</sup>

---

27 G.K. Chesterton, The Three Tools of Death in The Father  
 Brown Stories, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 167.

28 G.K. Chesterton, The Head of Caesar in The Father Brown  
 Stories, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 235.

29 G.K. Chesterton, The Invisible Man in The Father Brown  
 Stories, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 77.

We do not think that any of these tales can be designated as either drab or dull. Rather there is a certain magic quality about them which seems to splash them with color even when the scene of the crime is laid on the bleak grey moorlands, or in the equally bleak grey modern office building. The perpetual wonder before all existence which the author experiences himself seems to make them in a sense captivating. What if Father Brown's remarkable intuitive powers make him the gift of every particular of the murder down to the most minute detail, while we of slower intelligence are left breathless and gasping at his lightning-like solutions! It is true that this can be somewhat disconcerting to our ego, but nevertheless we can always manage a chuckle at the little man's smiling sang-froid, and a hearty laugh at the discomfiture of his confrères for whom we have a certain secret sympathetic fellow-feeling.

Then too, we are provided with something more than mental relaxation, with something that is more than an escape from the "dailiness" of life. Because G.K. Chesterton has a definite philosophy for living we find in these stories many of the same thought-provoking ideas with which his more important works abound. Published as they were eleven years before he was received into the Church, it is interesting to note that his serious thinking along Catholic lines over-

flowed into everything he wrote. And so we find Father Brown proclaiming with certitude the moral law. He defends the place of reason as a guide to faith and condemns Nature as the object of man's obedience. Confession is recommended as a remedy for a sense of moral guilt, because sin is real, and although it is positive it is not a physical malady but a spiritual one, and therefore must be combatted by spiritual means. The humility which insists that a man regard his sinful brother not from the heights of his own virtue but from the depths of his own sinfulness is held up for our emulation. In every story we are made conscious of the fact that for Gilbert Chesterton God exists, that men owe obedience to His law, and that murder and theft are not only crimes against the state, but they are also sins against the great and omnipotent but all-merciful God.

## CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

The second series of Father Brown stories made its appearance in 1914 under the title of The Wisdom of Father Brown. That was the year that saw the beginning of World War I, and it was the year too, which witnessed Gilbert Chesterton's grave illness, his recovery from which was almost miraculous. We find in this group of narratives a preoccupation with that false mysticism and supernaturalism against which he inveighs so forcefully in his essays, and which was an inevitable result of the growing materialism of the age. He is concerned too, with the nascent science of criminology which seems to him to be so often divorced from common-sense. Almost a decade before, he had had quite a lengthy and "pugnacious" controversy with Robert Blachford, Editor of The Clarion, concerning the question of Responsibility and Free Will, and here we find him making Father Brown state that we can direct our moral wills, that we can choose to be wicked.

We propose to analyze several stories of this series in order to show that G.K. Chesterton makes use of this literary genre to disseminate many of the ideas which we find in his essays; to establish the fact that his didacticism is apparent here too, and that even in the detective story Mr. Chesterton is the teacher of truth and morality.

ANALYSIS OF THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

30

The Absence of Mr. Glass is a gentle satire on a certain type of scientific pomposity. Father Brown consults Dr. Hood, eminent criminologist and specialist on certain moral disorders. Why he does so is not quite clear unless it is to give us the opportunity of witnessing the discomfiture of that learned gentleman when all his marvellous theorizing leads him completely off the track. The reason given by the priest is that a member of his flock, a Mrs. McNab, is much concerned about one of her lodgers, Todhunter by name, whom Maggie McNab wants to marry, but whose means of livelihood is shrouded in mystery. The Doctor is asked to lend his aid in clearing up the matter.

The great specialist having condescended to the priest's simplicity, condescended expansively. He settled himself with comfort in his armchair and began to talk in the tone of a somewhat absent-minded lecturer:

'Even in a minute instance, it is best to look first to the main tendencies in Nature. A particular flower may not be dead in early winter, but the flowers are dying; a particular pebble may never be wetted by the tide, but the tide is coming in. To the scientific eye all human history is a series of collective movements, destructions or migrations, like the massacre of flies in winter or the return of birds in spring. Now the root fact of all history is Race. Race produces religion; Race produces legal and ethical wars. There is no stronger case than that of the wild, unworldly and perishing stock which we commonly call the Celts, of whom your friends the McNabs are specimens. Small, swarthy, of this dreamy and drifting blood, they accept easily the superstitious explanation of any incidents just as they still accept (you will excuse me for saying) that superstitious explanation of all incidents which you and your Church represent. It is not remarkable that

such people, with the sea moaning behind them and the Church (excuse me again) droning in front of them, should put fantastic features into what are probably plain events. You, with your parochial responsibilities see only this particular Mrs. McNab, terrified with this particular tale of two voices and a tall man out of the sea. But the man with the scientific imagination sees, as it were, the whole clan of McNab scattered over the whole world, in its ultimate average as uniform as a tribe of birds. He sees the thousands of Mrs. McNabs, in thousands of houses, dropping their little bit of morbidity in the tea-cups of their friends.<sup>1</sup>

One can almost hear Father Brown chuckle (one certainly can hear Chesterton) as he stands aside and allows the Doctor to make use of his scientific methods in so wonderful a manner that his imagination actually creates the murdered man, Mr. Glass, whose body has been made to disappear in some mysterious way which he fails to mention. Father Brown is highly amused;

'Dr. Hood,' he cried enthusiastically, 'you are a great poet! You have called an uncreated being out of the void. How much more godlike that is than if you had ferreted out the mere facts! Indeed the mere facts are rather commonplace and comic by comparison.'<sup>2</sup>

We think that enough of the story has been quoted to point out that the author is demonstrating here the inductive or synthetic method working side by side with the deductive or reasoning method. There is a contest here; and the contestants are science versus reason. It is superfluous to say

---

<sup>1</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Absence of Mr. Glass in The Wisdom of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, 1947, pp.174-175.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 180.

which wins, since Father Brown always solves the mystery and never loses a case.

The following quotation from one of Chesterton's essays seems to explain Dr. Hood's blunders rather well:

It is the man who talks about a law that he has never seen who is the mystic. Nay, the ordinary scientific man is strictly a sentimentalist. He is a sentimentalist in this essential sense, that he is soaked and swept away by mere associations. He has so often seen birds fly and lay eggs that he feels that there must be some dreary, tender connection between the two ideas, whereas, there is none. A forlorn lover might not be able to dissociate the moon from lost love; so the materialist is unable to dissociate the moon from the tide.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Hood thinks that Mrs. McNab being Celtic and Catholic would be sure to find a supernatural explanation for the unusual events; but he finds nothing ridiculous in the fact that he, a scientist and therefore a rationalist, in one operation of his imagination creates a human being and then calmly annihilates him.

The Mistake of the Machine is another tale concerning scientific methods: this time a lie-detector has been employed to determine whether or not an alleged criminal is guilty.

'This method,' remarked Flambeau, 'has been guaranteed by some of the greatest American men of science.'

'What sentimentalists men of science are!' exclaimed Father Brown, 'and how much more sentimental must American men of science be! Who but

---

<sup>3</sup> G.K. Chesterton, quoted by Raymond Bond in The Man Who Was Chesterton, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1937, p. 412.

a Yankee would think of proving anything by heart-throbs? Why they must be as sentimental as a man who thinks that a woman is in love with him if she blushes. That's a test from the circulation of the blood discovered by the immortal Harvey; and a jolly rotten test too.'

'But surely,' insisted Flambeau, 'it might point pretty straight at something or other.'

'There's a disadvantage in a stick pointing straight,' answered the other, 'What is it? Why, the other end of the stick always points the opposite way. It depends whether you get hold of the stick by the right end.'<sup>4</sup>

And later when the machine has been tried and proved to have failed, much to the discomfiture of the men who used it, Father Brown observes,

'You always forget that the reliable machine has to be worked by an unreliable machine.'

'Why, what do you mean?' asked the detective.

'I mean Man,' said Father Brown, 'the most unreliable machine I know of. I don't want to be rude; and I don't think that you will consider Man to be an inaccurate or offensive description of yourself. You say that you observed his manner; but how do you know that you observed it right? You say that the words have to come in a natural way; but how do you know that you did it naturally? How do you know, if you come to that, that he did not observe your manner? Who is to prove that you were not tremendously agitated? There was no machine tied on to your pulse.'

And when the other insists that the machine can't lie - 'No machine can lie,' said Father Brown; 'nor can it tell the truth.'<sup>5</sup>

The priest has only abhorrence for this latest invention of scientific criminology which takes from a man some of his human dignity by interfering with his free will. In one of

---

<sup>4</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Mistake of the Machine in The Wisdom of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, 1947, p. 221.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 227.

his essays Chesterton writes a scathing denunciation of something very similar. He says that it has been blandly and placidly proposed that persons accused of a crime be subjected to some hypnotic influence to induce a condition in which they will become talkative and therefore will tell the truth. He feels he need not say what he thinks of the morality of that sort of thing, but he does point out what the practical, social effects would be, declaring that it is an idea proposed by people who take advantage of the popular reverence for science and the popular ignorance of it. "Not all the martyrs to science have been scientists", he says.<sup>6</sup>

An interesting and clever little tale is The Man In The Passage. In the long corridor off which open the dressing rooms in the theatre, a beautiful and talented young actress has been murdered. A mirror at the extreme end of the passage leads to a mistake made by both Captain Cutler and Sir Wilson Seymour that there was a strange looking creature, of which they give a graphic description, in the building at the time. At the trial of the temperamental actor Bruno (who seems to have been accused of the crime simply because he was temperamental) Father Brown is being questioned:

There was an utter vast and unnatural silence, and this time it was the judge who spoke. 'So you really mean that when you looked down that passage,

---

<sup>6</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Come To Think of It, London, Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1930, pp. 140-141.

the man you saw was yourself - in a mirror?'

'Yes, my lord, that is what I was trying to say,' said Brown, 'but they asked me for the shape; and our hats do have corners like horns, so I --'

The judge leaned forward, his old eyes yet more brilliant, and said in specially distinct tones: 'Do you really mean to say that when Sir Wilson Seymour saw that wild what-you-call-him with curves and a woman's hair and a man's trousers, what he saw was Sir Wilson Seymour?'

'Yes, my lord,' said Father Brown.

'And you mean to say that when Captain Cutler saw that chimpanzee with humped shoulders and hog's bristles, he simply saw himself?'

'Yes, my lord.'

The judge leaned back in his chair with a luxuriance in which it was hard to separate the cynicism and admiration. 'And can you tell us why,' he asked, 'you should know your own figure in a looking-glass, when two such distinguished men don't?'

Father Brown blinked even more painfully than before; then he stammered: 'Really, my lord, I don't know ... unless it's because I don't look at it so often.'<sup>7</sup>

Now, that last statement is quite evidently one of the famous Chestertonian paradoxes, and requires some thought to arrive at its meaning. But if one is familiar with the following passage found among Gilbert Chesterton's essays, the story is seen to be what it very likely is, the expression of the same thought as that of the essay but brought out in a different and more picturesque manner.

When they (contemporary mystics) said that a wooden post was wonderful they meant that they could make something wonderful out of it by

---

<sup>7</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Man In The Passage in The Wisdom of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 220.

thinking about it ... The modern mystic looked for the post, not outside in the garden, but inside in the mirror of his own mind. But the mirror of the mystic, like a dandy's dressing-room, was entirely made of mirrors. Glass repeated glass like doors opening inwards forever; till one could hardly see that inmost chamber of unreality where the post made its last appearance. And as the mirrors of the modern mystic's mind are most of them curved and many of them cracked, the post in its ultimate reflection looked like all sorts of things: a water spout, the tree of knowledge, a sea serpent standing upright, and so on ... But I was never interested in mirrors; that is I was never primarily interested in my own reflection - or reflections. I am interested in wooden posts which do startle me like miracles ... all my mental doors open outwards into a world I have not made.<sup>8</sup>

Sir Wilson and the Captain, symbolizing the false mystics, do not recognize themselves because their vision is distorted; but the little priest, the true mystic does know himself.

Chesterton struck many a blow at the modern mystic in his controversial writings and in his fiction too. In the series of stories which is here under consideration we have two in which the rationalism of Father Brown is at war with that false mysticism which is really mystification shrouding something spiritually unhealthy. The Purple Wig centers round the Duke of Exmoor who wears a wig of that strange color to hide from curious eyes a deformed ear which is supposed to be the result of a curse inherited from his ancestors.

---

<sup>8</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Colored Lands quoted in Paradox In Chesterton by Hugh Kenner, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1947, pp. 76-77.

So cleverly has he played upon the superstitious imagination of the people of the country-side that almost everyone is convinced that the wig covers something monstrous and diabolical. A reporter for The Daily Reformer lends his assistance to Father Brown who is determined to put an end to all the imagined evil by uncovering whatever the real evil is. When the priest requests the Duke to take off the wig his lordship replies,

'I spare you. I refuse. If I gave you the faintest hint of the load of horror that I have to bear alone, you would lie shrieking at these feet of mine and begging to know no more. I will spare you the hint. You shall not spell the first letter of what is written on the altar of the Unknown God.'

'I know the Unknown God,' said the little priest, with an unconscious grandeur of certitude that stood up like a granite tower. 'I know his name; it is Satan. The True God was made flesh and dwelt among us. And I say to you, wherever you find men ruled merely by mystery, it is the mystery of iniquity. If the devil tells you something is too fearful to look at, look at it. If he says something is too terrible to hear, hear it. If you think some truth unbearable, bear it. I entreat Your Grace to end this nightmare now and here at this table.'

'If I did,' said the Duke in a low voice, 'you, and all you believe, and all by which alone you live, would be the first to shrivel and perish. You would have an instant to know the great Nothing before you died.'

'The Cross of Christ be between me and harm,' said Father Brown. 'Take off your wig.'<sup>9</sup>

It is here that the reporter, albeit in fear and trembling,

---

9 G.K. Chesterton, The Purple Wig in The Wisdom of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 253.

snatches off the terrible head-covering to reveal nothing but the shiny bald head and the colossal vanity of a man who having purchased the title claimed also the doubtful prestige which was attached to the possession of the Exmoor family curse.

A family curse supplies the plot also for the Perishing of the Pendragons. There is a flaming tower followed always by the sinking of a ship captained by some member of the wealthy Cornish family. The elaborately constructed superstition is a cloak for evil - but it is human evil. Admiral Pendragon has already been responsible for the death of his father and brother by arranging for a false signal from a flaming tower, and now is planning the same fate for his nephew. Thanks to Father Brown, who like his literary creator, hates with a healthy hatred whatever masquerades as the supernatural, the story has a happy-ever-after ending for the nephew and his fiancée. Father Brown is a rationalist, in the sense that he makes use of reason to test his intuitions, but he is a true mystic of the kind that Chesterton wrote when he said that no pure mystic ever loved pure mystery. The mystic does not make doubts and riddles, because they already exist; he does not make mysteries, he destroys them. He is the man who offers an explanation which may not be true but is always comprehensible.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Paradox in Chesterton, quoted by Hugh Kenner, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1947, p. 129.

ANALYSIS OF THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

39

The Strange Crime of John Boulnois is a story that is somewhat different. Sir Claude Champion kills himself in order to destroy a man whom he hates by throwing suspicion upon him. As Mrs. Boulnois puts it to Father Brown,

'He hated my husband because my husband wouldn't hate him. My husband is a great man. Sir Claude Champion was not a great man; he was a celebrated and successful man. My husband has never been celebrated or successful; and it is the solemn truth that he has never dreamed of being so. He no more expects to be famous for thinking than for smoking cigars. On all that side he has a sort of splendid stupidity. He has never grown up. He still liked Champion exactly as he liked him at school; he admired him as he would admire a conjuring trick at the dinner table. But he couldn't be got to conceive the notion of envying Champion. And Champion wanted to be envied. He went mad and killed himself for that.'

'And Haman began to tell them,' said Father Brown, 'of all the things wherein the king had honoured him; and he said: All these things profit me nothing while I see Mordecai the Jew, sitting in the gate.'<sup>11</sup>

The egoist enshrines himself within his own heart where he perpetually offers to himself the pungent incense of praise and adulation; but he is not content unless every knee is bent before him and all men envy him. Further on in the story we read:

'I know your husband only slightly,' says Father Brown, 'but I think this crime of his, as generally conceived, something of a moral impossibility. Please

---

<sup>11</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Strange Crime of John Boulnois in The Wisdom of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 301.

ANALYSIS OF THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

40

do not think I mean that Boulnois could not be so wicked. Anybody can be wicked - as wicked as he chooses. We can direct our wills; but we can't generally change our instinctive tastes and ways of doing things. Boulnois might commit a murder, but not this murder.<sup>12</sup>

This is the dogma of free will in which Chesterton firmly believed and which he defended enthusiastically against the Determinists many years before he became a Catholic. We find him stating this same dogma very beautifully in an essay thus:

'But for Catholics it is a fundamental dogma of the Faith that all human beings, without any exception whatever were specifically made, were shaped and pointed like shining arrows, for the end of hitting the mark of Beatitude. It is true that the shafts are feathered with free will; and therefore throw the shadow of all the tragic possibilities of free will; and that the Church (having also been aware for ages of that darker side of truth which the sceptics have just discovered) does also draw attention to the darkness of that potential tragedy. But that does not make any difference to the gloriousness of the potential glory. In one aspect it is even a part of it; since the freedom is itself a glory.'<sup>13</sup>

John Boulnois might commit murder. Because he is free he can sin or not sin; he is a creature of God endowed with intelligence and free will. Fulton Sheen says that Christianity begins first with the principle that man is made to the image

---

12 Ibid. p. 300.

13 G.K. Chesterton, Is Humanism A Religion in The Thing, London, Sheed & Ward, 1929, p. 26.

and likeness of God which means that he has an intelligence and will. As a creature he is dependent on his Creator; as a free being he is relatively independent of Him. The paradox of Christianity is that man is independent because he is dependent.<sup>14</sup>

There is a story called The Head of Caesar about a young man who inherits from his father the wonderful Carstairs Collection of coins, but gradually begins to hate the Roman money he has and grows fonder of the real money denied him. Selling the collection he begins to blackmail his sister to whom his father has left the bulk of his fortune. When Flambeau says contemptuously,

'Well, and so this great numismatic and coin-collector was nothing but a vulgar miser.'

'Is there so great a difference?' asked Father Brown. 'What is there wrong about a miser that is not often as wrong about a collector? What is wrong, except - Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image; Thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them...'<sup>15</sup>

Whatever takes first place in a man's heart, whether it be wealth or power or prestige or even love, becomes a sort of idol because God is robbed of His rightful place and of His rightful adoration too.

---

<sup>14</sup> Fulton Sheen, Philosophy of Religion, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948, p. 189.

<sup>15</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Head of Caesar in The Wisdom of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 244.

ANALYSIS OF THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

42

We do not say that these stories that we have examined are great literature, a discussion of that point does not lie within the scope of this present thesis; but we do say that they contain some great truths. Father Brown's denunciation of the use of a lie-detecting machine is justifiable and right, since anything that interferes with a man's free will is immoral. It requires no great stretch of the imagination to visualize what would have been G.K. Chesterton's reaction to the brain-washing methods employed by the materialistic governments of our day. One characteristic of the author which appears so often all through his stories is his consciousness of the innate dignity of man, sinner though he be, a dignity that springs from the possession of an immortal soul made in the image of God; and another, is his true spirituality, his God-consciousness, which fills him with a healthy hatred of anything that savors of false supernaturalism, and causes him to make Father Brown strip with relentless hand the disguise from some apparently other-worldly happenings and show them for what they are - a cloak for human evil.

Always he shows a deadly hatred of falsehood masquerading as truth and hence his anger against the so-called science of criminology which he feels is not based on a fundamental and true knowledge of man as a person. A critic

says of Gilbert Chesterton:

He is plainly not a great literary artist. It would be folly, for example, to rank him with so disciplined a craftsman as T.S. Eliot. He is a great moral philosopher, and like his Master, a great physician of souls and minds ... His perceptions were metaphysical rather than aesthetic: they never fathered creative fusion. One might almost say that they were too comprehensive and vivid to be fused. ... If he cannot practice art in its major sense, as creation, he practices constantly in its broader sense as making; and what he makes is never trivial; it is always geared to his extraordinary metaphysical perception. Here, in this less intense form of aesthetic activity, if he is not great, he is sane. Art consists first in knowing and then in making. Chesterton knew, and he knew how to make; he merely did not polish what he made.<sup>16</sup>

What he made was indeed never trivial, never insignificant; and these detective tales, which on the surface seem to contradict that statement, prove upon examination to be anything but trivial. That they are light in the sense that they provide entertainment and relaxation is certainly true; but that they contain words of wisdom and sound moral teaching we believe we have shown to be also true. They are the work of a man who once wrote that even if we think religion insoluble we cannot think it irrelevant; that even if we think that we have no view of the ultimate verities, we must feel that

---

<sup>16</sup> Hugh Kenner, Paradox in Chesterton, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1947, p. 2.

ANALYSIS OF THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

44

wherever such a view exists in a man that it must be more important than anything else in him.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Heretics, London, John Lane, 1912, p. 288.

## CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE INCREDULITY OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

The third series of Father Brown stories contains eight tales, the greater number of which are concerned with superstitions of all kinds; with the adoration of those idols which men erect for themselves when they refuse to acknowledge the true God. It was in 1926 that this group was published, four years after Mr. Chesterton's reception into the Catholic Church, and we find ourselves reading these narratives with special care to see if we can detect any difference in the teaching contained in them.

But of course the truth is, that by his baptism nothing was added to the beliefs which he had held for years; he had been a Catholic in his approach to life for a long time, but now he could write of things pertaining to the Church with a greater familiarity. In one of these stories he ingeniously links up the early ages of faith with latter-day Catholicity, and startles us somewhat with the prophetic words which he makes Father Brown utter, some of which have since been fulfilled in countries behind the Iron Curtain.

He uses these stories to teach truths that he knows are eminently important; and they are important to every man whatever religion he professes although they are taught primarily by the Catholic Church. Because he writes in this way he has been accused of being a propagandist; but he

defends his position thus:

A Catholic putting Catholicism into a novel, or a song or a sonnet, or anything else, is not being a propagandist; he is simply being a Catholic ... When we say that songs are full of the spirit of the sea, we do not mean that the poet is recruiting for the navy. We mean that he loves the sea, and would like other people to love it.<sup>1</sup>

It is because his philosophy of life and his religion overflowed into everything he wrote that we believe that even his detective tales are worthy of serious consideration. For this reason we propose to analyze several of them to show that even in this type of fiction Chesterton is still an expositor of the moral law and of the doctrines of the Catholic Church.

In The Arrow of Heaven three American millionaires have been murdered successively, each having had in his possession at the time the Coptic Cup. Because Brander Merton, the last victim, was killed by an arrow at the moment when apparently completely alone in his office he was admiring the beauty of the Cup, a sense of the supernatural is felt by his friends. Thanks to Father Brown's common sense the mystery is solved: the murderer of Merton is the secretary Wilton whose father was one of the millionaires murdered by the so-called Daniel Doom who was really Brander Merton. The friends of the millionaire were perfectly willing to condone Wilton's act in killing Daniel Doom whom they consider "a worthless,

---

<sup>1</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Novel With A Purpose, in America, February 19, 1927.

ANALYSIS OF THE INCREDULITY OF FATHER BROWN SERIES 47

murderous blackguard". However, when Father Brown informs them that Merton and Doom are one and the same person there is an entirely different reaction, and the priest who does not often show excitement does so now.

'No,' he cried, in a voice like a pistol shot. 'There shall be no difference. I gave you your chance of pitying the poor devil when you thought he was a common criminal. You wouldn't listen then; you were all for letting him be butchered like a wild beast without a hearing or a public trial, and said he had only got his deserts. Very well then, if Daniel Doom has got his deserts, Brander Merton has got his. If that was good enough for Doom it is good enough for Merton.'<sup>2</sup>

A firm and staunch believer in the brotherhood of man and consequently in the equality of all men Chesterton says elsewhere, "the common things of men outclass all classes."<sup>3</sup>

G.K. Chesterton was fond of pets of all kinds especially of dogs, and in his Song of Quoodle he has immortalized his beloved little Scottie. But he distinguished between the lower animals and men, and in the Oracle of The Dog he makes Father Brown voice his opinion. A murder has been committed in a summer-house which was accessible by only one door; the element of superstition is introduced when a huge black retriever bearing the suggestive name Knox, dashes towards the family lawyer for no apparent reason, barking furiously and

---

<sup>2</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Arrow of Heaven in The Incredulity of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p.351.

<sup>3</sup> G.K. Chesterton, quoted in The Man Who Was Chesterton, by Raymond Bond, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1937, p.796.

murderously. When the lawyer flees Father Brown refuses to take any occult meaning from that fact.

'Yes, I always like a dog so long as he isn't spelt backwards.'

'But you told me just now that the dog hadn't anything to do with it, that my feelings about him were all nonsense,' (said Fiennes).

'The dog had everything to do with it,' said Father Brown, 'as you'd have found out if you'd only treated the dog as a dog and not as God Almighty, judging men. ... The dog could almost have told you the story if he could talk... You made up his story for him, and made him talk with the tongues of men and angels. It's part of something I'd noticed more and more in the modern world, appearing in all sorts of newspaper rumours and conversational catch words; something that's arbitrary without being authoritative. People readily swallow the untested claims of this or that or the other. It's drowning all your old rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition.' He stood up abruptly, his face heavy with a sort of frown, and went on talking almost as if he were alone. 'It's the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense, and can't see things as they are. Anything that anyone talks about and says there's a good deal in it extends itself indefinitely like a vista in a nightmare. And a dog is an omen, and a cat is a mystery, and a pig is a mascot,... and all because you are frightened of four words, He was made Man.'<sup>4</sup>

According as men lose their belief in God do they become more and more superstitious. Men need the security of faith in a personal God Who is concerned with their happiness and well-

---

<sup>4</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Oracle of The Dog in The Incredulity of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 352.

being. In a very fine paragraph written as the concluding remarks in a collection of essays Chesterton says that man can be defined as an animal that makes dogmas; but in piling doctrine on doctrine in the formation of some tremendous scheme of philosophy and religion he becomes more and more human. When he drops one doctrine after another in a refined scepticism he begins sinking slowly backwards into the vagueness of the animals and the unconsciousness of the grass.<sup>5</sup>

As if to round this off we have a passage from another murder mystery in the same series. The title of it is The Miracle of Moon Crescent, and concerns the mysterious disappearance of the famous reformer Warren Wynd, under the usual conditions of the locked and guarded single entrance to his room. When Father Brown solves the mystery and shows that there is nothing miraculous in the affair at all he says to the three men who are on the scene with him, a millionaire oil magnate, a cheery advocate of a new religion, and a famous psychologist:

'Don't think I blame you for jumping to preternatural conclusions. The reason is very simple really. You all swore you were hard-shelled materialists; and as a matter of fact you were all balanced on the very edge of belief - of belief in almost anything. There are thousands balanced on it today; but it's a sharp uncomfortable edge to sit on. You won't rest until

---

5 G.K. Chesterton, Heretics, London, John Lane, 1912, p. 286.

you believe in something; that's why Mr. Vandom went through new religions with a tooth-comb, and Mr. Albion quoted Scripture for his religion of breathing exercises, and Mr. Fenner grumbles at the very God he denies. That's where you are all split; it's natural to believe in the supernatural. It never feels natural to accept only natural things.'<sup>6</sup>

If man were only animal then natural things would satisfy him; but he is spirit as well as flesh, with his feet on the solid earth and his soul drawn towards the stars. St. Augustine says the same thing as the author when he says that we are made to possess the Infinite God and our hearts will never be at peace until they rest in Him. That man needs a God is historically true, and when he fails to possess knowledge of the true God he makes for himself idols.

Another passage in the same story although simple enough in the beginning contains at the end a thought-provoking sentence which could provide material for lengthy meditation. Father Brown is speaking:

'What is any man that he should be a judge of men? These three were the tramps who once stood before him and were dismissed rapidly right and left to one place or another; as if for them there were no hope of courtesy, no free will in friendship. And twenty years has not exhausted the indignation born of that unfathomable insult in that moment when he dared to know them at a glance.'<sup>7</sup>

---

6 G.K. Chesterton, The Miracle of Moon Crescent in The Incredulity of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 385-386.

7 Ibid. p. 385.

ANALYSIS OF THE INCREDULITY OF FATHER BROWN SERIES 51

To Chesterton for whom a post was a wonderful thing, who felt himself unworthy of a wildflower, how much more marvellous was a man, and with what reverence did he not treat his fellow wayfarers on the road of life.

Once more we have a story based on the idea of a family curse, and called The Doom of the Darnaways. Once more superstition is used as a camouflage for evil, the murder of young Darnaway.

'Of course, there's no Doom of the Darnaways to prevent your marrying anybody you have any decent reason for marrying,' said Father Brown. 'A man isn't fated to fall into the smallest venial sin, let alone into crimes like suicide and murder. You can't be made to do wicked things against your will because your name is Darnaway, any more than because your name is Brown.'<sup>8</sup>

After the murder when Dr. Barnet insists that it was suicide, Father Brown says

'I see you do believe in the superstition after all.'

'What do you mean, believe in the superstition? I believe in the suicide as a matter of scientific necessity.'

'Well,' replied the priest, 'I don't see a pin to choose between your scientific superstition and the other magical superstition. They both seem to end by turning people into paralytics, who can't move their own legs or arms to save their own lives or souls.'<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Doom of the Darnaways in The Incredulity of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 434.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 438.

ANALYSIS OF THE INCREDULITY OF FATHER BROWN SERIES 52

Chesterton tells us that it was the seculars who drove him to theological ethics because they destroyed any sane possibility of secular ethics. It was the Determinists who told him that he could not be responsible even to secular society; but he preferred to be treated as a responsible human being not as a lunatic and so he became interested in the Church.<sup>10</sup> This doctrine of free will is tremendously important to Chesterton and again and again he returns to it. It is as though he felt that if he repeated it often enough in every conceivable way he would eventually convince those who denied it or were confused concerning it.

The Curse of The Golden Cross stands alone among the Father Brown stories, because although the mystery of the manner of the crime is solved by the priest, the murderer is never tracked down. Was it simply that the author found it impossible to really finish the story or did he deliberately leave the professor still pursued by his unseen enemy so as to end the tale on that particular note; or is the invisible murderer meant to be the spirit of evil, Satan, who down through the ages has perpetually attacked those who believe in Christ and His Cross of Redemption? The story is built around the discovery by Professor Smaill of a golden cross

---

<sup>10</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy, London, John Lane, 1908, p. 91.

bearing on its reverse side the Icthus or fish, an early Christian symbol. The archaeologist has been the recipient of many threatening letters sent by some madman who warns him that his murder has been planned. While convalescing after an almost successful attempt on his life the Professor has strange fancies.

Again and again all these Byzantine patterns would fade away like the fading gold on which they were traced as upon fire; and nothing remained but the dark bare wall of rock on which the shining shape of the fish was traced as with a finger dipped in the phosphorescence of fishes. For that was the sign which he once looked up and saw in the moment when he first heard round the corner of the dark passage the voice of his enemy.

'And at last,' he said, 'I think I have seen a meaning in the picture and the voice. ... Why should I worry because one madman among a million of sane men, leagued in a great society against him, chooses to brag of persecuting me or of pursuing me to death? The man who drew in the dark catacombs the secret symbol of Christ was persecuted in a very different fashion. He was a solitary madman; the whole sane society was leagued together not to save him, but to slay him. ... I thought I had the right to be alarmed because I was creeping through the bowels of the earth in the dark and there was a man who would destroy me. What would it have been like if the destroyer had been up in the daylight and had owned all the earth and commanded all the armies and the crowds? What was it like to deal with murder on that scale? The world has forgotten these things, as until a little while ago it had forgotten war.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'but the war came. The fish may be driven underground again, but it will come up into the daylight once more. As St. Anthony of Padua humourously remarked it is only fishes who survive the deluge.'<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Curse of the Golden Cross in The Incredulity of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 406-407.

Reading this one is reminded of all those suffering members of Christ who are behind the Iron Curtain and who know what it is like to deal with murder on a large scale; the thousands and tens of thousands who have lost liberty or life because they dared to believe in the Christ of whom the Icthus is the symbol.

In The Dagger With Wings which deals once more with murder and superstition we find this passage spoken by Father Brown:

'All things are from God, and above all, reason and imagination and the great gifts of the mind. They are good in themselves; and we must not altogether forget their origin even in their perversion. Now this man had in him a very noble power to be perverted; the power of telling stories. He was a great novelist; only he had twisted his fictive power to practical and to evil ends; to deceiving men with false fact instead of true fiction.'<sup>12</sup>

Was there ever a writer who used his great gifts of mind and intellect with the prodigality which was Chesterton's? Not only did he spend himself to teach a pagan and sceptical world the everlasting truths but he used those powers also to spread joy and happiness among all sorts of people many of whom were children. And all the time the serious writing, and the writing which on the surface was not so serious continued. The things he had to say were so unutterably im-

---

<sup>12</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Dagger With Wings, in The Incredulity of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 421.

ANALYSIS OF THE INCREDULITY OF FATHER BROWN SERIES 55

portant that it seemed as though he could not repeat them often enough, nor could he say them in enough different ways. Because he prided himself on being a journalist the essay was the medium which he employed most frequently; but debates, radio talks, novels, even detective stories were all used to diffuse the fundamental truths and sound moral doctrine. He wrote:

The really courageous man is he who defies tyrannies young as the morning and superstitions fresh as the first flowers. The only true free thinker is he whose intellect is as much free from the future as the past. He cares as little for what will be as what has been; he cares only for what ought to be.<sup>13</sup>

Caring so much for the world, the beauty of which reflected for him the All-Beautiful, he loved too, all men in the world; and loving them he desired their happiness. Since so much of the suffering of men is the result of faulty thinking, he took it upon himself to try to make men use their God-given faculties to arrive at truth. He was in a sense a reformer; but he was a happy and humourous reformer. He wrote once that the optimist is a better reformer than the pessimist because the man who believes life to be excellent is the man who reformes it. The pessimist is often enraged at evil, but the optimist is surprised at it. He thinks not

---

<sup>13</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Fear of the Past in The Man Who Was Chesterton, by Raymond Bond, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1937, p. 95.

only that injustice is distressing but actually that it is absurd, a matter less for tears than for a shattering laughter.<sup>14</sup>

Gilbert Chesterton makes use of his detective stories many a time to indulge his astonished laughter. Men ignore, if they do not deny, the existence of God, and in place of reality and truth they put their trust in all sorts of superstitious nonsense. In most of the tales of this series the author makes the attempt through Father Brown to show the absurdity of believing in a supernaturalism which is only a hoax leading its poor victims through labyrinthine ways not to light but to deeper and deeper darkness. And it would be so much simpler to believe in God and to trust Him.

We think that many mystery stories justify their existence by supplying a certain type of intellectual enjoyment which is distinctly unique; and if added to this they provide sound teaching on Christian morality and doctrine we believe that their value and our enjoyment are correspondingly increased. Our contention is that G.K. Chesterton's detective tales do just that.

---

<sup>14</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Dickens Period in The Man Who Was Chesterton by Raymond Bond, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1937, p. 656.

## CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE SECRET OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

The Secret of Father Brown made its appearance in 1927. The stories in this series, eight in number, are held together in a compact manner by having an introduction titled The Secret of Father Brown and a conclusion called The Secret of Flambeau. To the latter we have already referred in Chapter II. The former also merits an examination which will reveal a great deal that is deserving of consideration.

There is so much that is worthwhile in this first story that it seems to colour all the rest of the series and consequently we feel justified in stating that The Secret of Father Brown narratives do more than entertain; they contain sound moral principles and they indicate that G.K. Chesterton is manifestly a teacher of men whether he makes use of poetry, the essay, the novel, or the less ambitious detective tale. An analysis of several of these tales will be made in order to prove our point.

Flambeau has most appropriately acquired a castle in Spain, and having fallen in love with and consequently married a Spanish lady has settled down respectably to bring up a family. Father Brown, "that officious little loafer" is spending some time with his friend where he encounters an American, Mr. Grandison Chace, of Boston, who has heard of Father Brown's ability in solving so many dark mysteries of

crime. When he insists upon knowing how the priest does it, the latter says:

'You see, I had murdered them all myself,' explained Father Brown patiently. 'So of course I knew how it was done,... I had planned out each of the crimes very carefully, I had thought out how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was.'<sup>1</sup>

When Chace says that of course he knows that Father Brown is just speaking metaphorically the priest replies almost angrily:

'No, no, no, I don't mean just a figure of speech. What's the good of words? If you try to talk about a truth that's merely moral people always think it's merely metaphorical. ... I mean that I really did see myself, and my real self committing the murders. ... I mean I thought and thought about how a man might come to be like that until I realized that I really was like that in everything but actual final consent to the action. It was once suggested to me by a friend of mine, as a sort of religious exercise. I believe he got it from Pope Leo XIII, who was always rather a hero of mine.'<sup>2</sup>

Somewhat later Father Brown remarks that when they say that criminology is a science they mean that they study a man from the outside as if he were a gigantic insect; that they stare at the shape of his criminal skull as if it were a sort of eerie growth. When the scientist talks about a type he never means himself, but always his poorer neighbour. This kind of

---

I G.K. Chesterton, The Secret of Father Brown in The Secret of Father Brown Stories, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 464.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 465.

thing he says is not really knowledge at all, it is actually suppression of what we know. It is treating a friend as a stranger, and pretending that something familiar is really something remote and mysterious.

'No man is really any good till he knows how bad he is or might be,' says Father Brown; 'till he's realized exactly how much right he has to all his snobbery and sneering, and talking about criminals as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away; till he's squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal and kept him safe and sane under his own hat.'<sup>3</sup>

In The Chief Mourner of Marne we are treated to an excellent sermon on Christian charity, which we do not believe detracts in any way from our interest in the story. James and Maurice Mair fight a duel in which James is killed by the treachery of the younger man. Maurice assumes the identity of his brother and years later is found living as a hermit in the ancestral castle. When a newspaper proprietor, an Orangeman, endeavours to manufacture a story that will reflect discredit on the Church, Father Brown takes a hand in the matter and the truth comes out.

'There is a limit to human charity,' said Lady Outram, trembling all over.

'There is' said Father Brown dryly; 'and that is the real difference between human charity and Christian charity ... It seems to me that you only

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 465-466.

pardon the sins that you don't really think sinful. You only forgive criminals when they commit what you don't regard as crimes but rather as conventions. So you tolerate a conventional duel just as you tolerate a conventional divorce. You forgive because there isn't anything to be forgiven.'

'But hang it all,' cried Mallow, 'you don't expect us to be able to pardon a vile thing like this?'

'No', said the priest, 'but we have to touch such men, not with a barge pole but with a benediction. We have to say the words that will save them from hell. We alone are left to deliver them from despair when your human charity deserts them. ...Leave us with the men who commit the mean and revolting and real crimes; mean as St. Peter when the cock crew, and yet the dawn came.'<sup>4</sup>

The only kind of authority that any weak spirit wants or which any generous spirit feels, wrote Chesterton in Heretics, is the charity that forgives the sins that are like scarlet.

We find that The Actor and The Alibi is unique among Chesterton's detective tales because here we have a murder committed by a woman.

'She was something very much worse than a murderess,' said Father Brown, 'she was an egoist. She was the sort of person who had looked in the mirror before looking out of the window, and it is the worst calamity of mortal life.'

'I can't understand what all this means,' said Jarvis, 'everybody regarded her as a person of the most exalted ideals, always moving on a higher spiritual plane than the rest of us.'

'She regarded herself in that light,' said the other; 'and she knew how to hypnotize everybody else into it. Perhaps I hadn't known her long

---

<sup>4</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Chief Mourner of Marne in The Secret of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 583-584.

enough to be wrong about her. ...I've heard from everybody here all about her refinements and subtleties and spiritual soarings above poor Mandeville's head. But all these spiritualities and subtleties seem to me to boil themselves down to the simple fact that she certainly was a lady and he most certainly was not a gentleman. But do you know, I have never felt quite sure that St. Peter will make that the only test at the gate of heaven. ... You laughed when I said that the sulky look of Mrs. Sands was a study in character. But not in the character of Mrs. Sands. If you want to know what a lady is really like, don't look at her; for she may be too clever for you. Don't look at the men around her, for they may be too silly about her. But look at some other woman who is always near her, and especially one who is under her. You will see in that mirror her real face, and the face mirrored in Mrs. Sands was very ugly.<sup>5</sup>

Father Brown continues, that obviously Mrs. Mandeville had confided in every man about her intellectual loneliness; that although they said that she never complained still they quoted her as saying that her "uncomplaining silence strengthened her soul". The priest says that people who complain are just jolly Christian nuisances; "it's those that complain that they never complain who are the devil".<sup>6</sup> We have remarked before on Gilbert Chesterton's great love for his fellowmen; but that this love and the reverence which accompanied it was not based on a lack of knowledge of the human character can easily be seen from the above quotations.

In The Vanishing of Vaudray we find a man who allows

---

5 G.K. Chesterton, The Actor and The Alibi in The Secret of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 523.

6 Ibid. p. 524.

an insult so to fester in his mind that he plans an elaborate vengeance which eventually destroys himself. Commenting on the matter Father Brown says:

'You know that there are physical bodies on which a wound will not heal. Sir Arthur had a mind of that sort. It was as if it lacked the skin; he had a feverish vigilance of vanity; those strained eyes were open with an insomnia of egoism. Sensibility need not be selfishness. Sybil Rye for instance, has the same sort of skin and manages to be a sort of saint.'<sup>7</sup>

No spiritual writer could do better than that. Sensitiveness can lead to sanctity if we turn it away from ourselves and become sensitive of God's glory and our neighbour's happiness. It was that particular quality which made little Thérèse Martin into St. Teresa of Lisieux, and made Peter the coward, into St. Peter the martyr.

The Man With Two Beards is a rather gruesome thing in which the corpse of a murdered penitent ex-convict is used as a sort of stage property. The theme of the story is one which was ever dear to the heart of G.K. Chesterton: that because a man has free will he may become a great saint or an equally great sinner. He wrote once that Catholic literature deals with battle, and Catholic theology with hell, because our religion has always felt intensely the awful instant when a

---

<sup>7</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Vanishing of Vaudray in The Secret of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 539.

man must choose to take this load or that. Life is full of danger, like a boy's book; it is like a serial story which ends with the promise (or menace) "to be continued in our next". But it is exciting because we can finish it as we like.<sup>8</sup>

'There are no good or bad social types or trades,' says Father Brown. 'Any man can be a murderer like poor John; any man, even the same man, can be a saint like poor Michael. ...It's an understatement to say his reformation was sincere. He was one of the great penitents who manage to make more of penitence than others can make out of virtue...If ever a man went straight to heaven it might be he.'

'Hang it all,' said John Bankes restlessly, 'after all he was a convicted thief.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'and only a convicted thief has ever in this world heard that assurance, "This night shalt thou be with Me in Paradise".<sup>9</sup>

In The Red Moon of Meru we find that Lord and Lady Mounteagle have set up in the spacious grounds of their beautiful Abbey home a huge green idol.

'This seems a queer thing' said Hardcastle, frowning a little, 'to set up in the middle of an old abbey cloister.'

'Now don't tell me you're going to be silly,' said Lady Mounteagle. 'That's just what we meant; to link up the great religions of East and West, Buddha and Christ. Surely you must understand that all religions are really the same.'

'If they are', said Father Brown mildly, 'it seems rather unnecessary to go into the middle of Asia to get one.'<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> G.K. Chesterton, quoted in The Man Who Was Chesterton by Raymon Bond, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1937, p.399.

<sup>9</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Man With Two Beards in The Secret of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, 1947, p. 496.

<sup>10</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Red Moon of Meru in The Secret of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 559-560.

In 1927 G.K. Chesterton published The Everlasting Man which was destined to become a very important book and to endure a long time among those who read to learn. There is a chapter which deals with comparative religion from which we quote a portion to show the similarity in the thought to that in The Red Moon of Meru.

We are accustomed to see names of the great religious founders in a row: Christ; Mahomet; Buddha; Confucius. But in truth, this is only a trick; another of these optical illusions whereby any objects may be put into a particular relation by shifting to a particular point of sight. Those religions and religious founders, or rather those whom we choose to lump together as religions and religious founders, do not show any common character. The illusion is partly produced by Islam coming immediately after Christianity and is largely an imitation of Christianity. But the other Eastern religions or what we call religions not only do not resemble the Church, but do not resemble each other. ... In truth the Church is too unique to prove herself unique.<sup>11</sup>

In this story we have Chesterton the apologist defending the position of the Catholic Church; in others he is the champion of the common man whose potential sanctity and more actual sinfulness are yet compatible with the author's reverence.

"Mr. Belloc expresses fiercely," he says, "I express gently a respect for mankind".<sup>12</sup> It is not that he does not recognize

---

<sup>11</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Everlasting Man, London, Hodden & Stoughton, 1925, p. 97.

<sup>12</sup> G.K. Chesterton, in Return To Chesterton quoted by Maisie Ward, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1952, p. 60.

evil as such; he is capable of infusing into his stories so sinister an atmosphere that evil is sometimes almost tangible; and his detective stories differ from others of a like genre in that he is not only concerned with crime as an offense against society but also as evil opposed to good. A criminal is a sinner who uses his God-like gift of free will to choose to defy his Creator; but sinner or saint he is a human creature, a child of God and therefore worthy of reverence.

On the rare occasions when the rather placid Father Brown manifests impatience, it is against those reformers who examine a criminal as a specimen of some kind differing from themselves in species. "In so far as I am Man I am the chief of creatures. In so far as I am a man I am the chief of sinners",<sup>13</sup> says Chesterton. Any man can be a sinner and therefore any man can be a saint. It is in this very freedom to choose that lies the romance of rectitude; but charity must be extended to the man who makes the wrong choice, not because he deserves it, it would be justice if he did, but just because he does not.

Because all these ideas and many more of equal value can be shown to be expressed in The Secret of Father Brown

---

<sup>13</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy, London, John Lane, 1908, p. 170.

Stories we have no hesitation in stating that we believe that these detective tales do more than provide the reader with diversion and relaxation, they also teach in an entertaining manner much that is worth learning. A critic writing in Columbia says:

Chesterton has said great things and repeated the great truths without recourse to acerbity and sharpness and bitterness and impatience at any point. He prodded and found the weakness of his age but he was always of his time and never above it or beyond it. He was travelling in the company of his fellowmen in the dust and the grime and heat and cold and never floating above the weary procession giving directions through a loud speaker.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Ed. A. Connell, Columbia, June 1944.

## CHAPTER VI

ANALYSIS OF THE SCANDAL OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

The Scandal of Father Brown, the last group of the Father Brown Stories was published in 1935, a year before the death of Mr. Chesterton. For some time he and Hilaire Belloc had been comrades-in-arms in a fierce battle which they waged against Communism and too, against the Capitalism which had been responsible for its inception. Even in his lighter works, his detective tales, he voices his fierce anger against both these "heresies", and perhaps with even greater vehemence he attacks the materialism which follows inevitably in the wake of each.

All false philosophies fall under his sword and he perpetually defends the dignity of man because he is created in the Divine image and because God deigned to adopt man's image. Truth must be upheld at all costs and no medium should be considered too insignificant to serve his purpose which is the teaching of Catholic doctrine. We quote from an article which shortly after his death appeared in The Commonweal:

Few men have made it as clear as Chesterton that Catholicism is a way of life quite as much as it is a body of doctrine and a code of law. It is no doubt significant that the best missionary service Chesterton ever rendered the Church was writing the Father Brown stories. These presented a novelty in English letters, a priest everyone can and must like; and it requires very little knowledge of history to realize the import of that novelty.<sup>1</sup>

---

I George Shuster in The Commonweal, July 24, 1935.

In 1927 Chesterton wrote for America an essay in which he said that the difficulty with a story is in its simplicity and its swiftness; that what was wanted was a popular outline of the way in which ordinary affairs are affected by a Catholic point of view. He says that this point of view affects life, death, sex, social decencies. He thinks that when people understand the light that shines for the Catholic upon all these facts they would no longer be surprised to find it shining just as brightly on Catholic fiction.<sup>2</sup>

It is because that light, the luminosity of Catholic philosophy does shine very brightly indeed on the stories of The Scandal of Father Brown Series that we propose to analyze them in order to call attention to those truths which are illuminated by its brightness.

What is apparently the heartless murder of an old man forms the plot of The Insoluble Problem. The whole thing is staged to prevent Flambeau and Father Brown from following an international jewel thief who has planned to steal a famous reliquary richly studded with rubies. The wife of the robber, although she hates her share in it, helps with the gruesome trick. When the priest and his companion get safely away from the place, the former speaks:

---

2 G.K. Chesterton, The Novel With A Purpose in America, February 19, 1927.

ANALYSIS OF THE SCANDAL OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

69

'It was love,' said the priest, 'and it filled the house with terror.'

'Don't tell me,' protested Flambeau, 'that that beautiful woman is in love with that spider in spectacles.'

'No', said Father Brown and groaned again, 'she is in love with her husband. It is ghastly.'

'It is the state of things that I have often heard you recommend,' replied Flambeau. 'You cannot call that lawless love.'

'Not lawless in that sense,' answered Father Brown. Then he turned sharply and spoke with a new warmth: 'Do you think that I do not know that the love of a man and a woman was the first command of God and is as glorious as ever? Do I need to be told of the Garden of Eden or the Wine of Cana? It is just because the strength in the thing was the awful strength of God that it rages with that awful energy even when it breaks loose from God. When the garden becomes a jungle but still a glorious jungle; when the second fermentation turns the wine of Cana into the vinegar of Calvary. Do you think I don't know all of that?'<sup>3</sup>

Human love is sparked by Divine love; but love which forces the lover to sin for the beloved turns Eden into a wasteland.

In The Crime of The Communist an American millionaire and a German Count are found sitting bolt upright on the campus of an English college, Mandeville; both are dead. Suspicion falls on one of the professors who has Communistic leanings. But it is the Bursar, the practical business man who is guilty. Speaking of the professor of Chemistry, whose experimenting in poisons is the inadvertent cause of the death

---

<sup>3</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Insoluble Problem in The Scandal of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 701.

of the two men, Father Brown says that he is a bad man, not because he is a scientist but because he is a materialist in the sense of a beast. Therefore he is even worse than the murderer.<sup>4</sup> He is worse because to a materialist not only murder but all crimes are possible. A little later Father Brown says:

'I told you that heresies and false doctrines had become common and conversational; that everybody was used to them. Did you think I meant Communism when I said that? Why it was just the other way. You were all as nervous as cats about Communism... Of course Communism is a heresy; but it isn't a heresy that you people take for granted. It is Capitalism you take for granted; or rather the vices of Capitalism disguised as dead Darwinism. Do you realize what you were all saying in the Common Room about life being only a scramble, and nature demanding the survival of the fittest, and how it doesn't matter whether the poor are paid justly or not? Why, that is the heresy that you have grown accustomed to, my friends; and it's every bit as much a heresy as Communism. That's the anti-Christian morality that you take quite naturally, and that's the immorality that has made a man a murderer today.'<sup>5</sup>

We think that this last bit of the story dripping with the Chestertonian brand of satire is also worth quoting; no comment seems to be required:-

'He only wanted to abolish God,' explained Father Brown in a temperate and reasonable tone. 'He only wanted to destroy the Ten Commandments and root up

---

<sup>4</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Crime of The Communist in The Scandal of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 670.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 672.

all the religion and civilization that had made him, and wash out all the common sense of ownership and honesty; and let his country and his culture be flattened out by savages from the ends of the earth. That's all he wanted. You have no right to accuse him of anything beyond that. Hang it all, everybody draws the line somewhere! And you come here and calmly suggest that a Mandeville Man of the old generation would have begun to smoke, or even strike a match while he was still drinking the College Port, of the vintage of '08 - no, no; men are not so utterly without laws and limits as all that!'<sup>6</sup>

In The Pursuit of Mr. Blue Chesterton strikes another blow at the Capitalist. The murder of the millionaire Graham Bruce takes place in full view of the private detective Muggleton, who has been hired to protect him. To Father Brown whom he has been advised to consult, Muggleton tells the facts, confessing his chagrin at his failure. The private secretary to the dead tycoon doubts the story.

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'I'm rather fond of people who are fools and failures on their own confession ... Perhaps it's because so many people are fools and failures without any confession.'<sup>7</sup>

And later on in the story:-

'My dear fellow,' said Father Brown, for the first time stung by impatience into familiarity, 'everybody's got a motive in a way. Considering the way that Bruce made his money, considering the way most millionaires make their money, almost anybody in the world might

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 674.

<sup>7</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Pursuit of Mr. Blue in The Scandal of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 655.

have done such a perfectly natural thing as throw him into the sea. In many, one might almost fancy, it would be almost automatic. To almost all it must have occurred at some time or other. ... I might have done it, "Nisi me constringeret ecclesiae auctoritas". Anybody but for the one true morality, might be tempted to accept so obvious, so simple a solution.'<sup>8</sup>

Anyone could have killed the Capitalist - that to Chesterton was the romance of life; that was the terribly fascinating thing about the present moment of time, the now, when a man because he was a human person endowed with intelligence and free will made his decision, his will being directed by the moral law.

In The Quick One, we have the murder of John Raggley whom the author says was one of a great line of some half a dozen men who might have saved England. They stand up like disregarded sign-posts along the smooth descending road which ends in the swamp of commercial collapse.<sup>9</sup> During the investigation of the murder we find this conversation:

'You see it's so easy to be misunderstood. All men matter. You matter. I matter. It's the hardest thing in theology to believe. ... We matter to God - God only knows why. But that is the only possible justification of the existence of policemen. ... Don't you see, the law really is right in a way, after all. If all men matter, all murders matter. That which He has so mysteriously created, we must not suffer to be mysteriously destroyed.'<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 655.

<sup>9</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Quick One in The Scandal of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 613.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

God, the Creator, is preoccupied perpetually with man His creature, and consequently all men must matter. Because God became man everything starts from the central point of the Incarnation. Writing of his controversy with G.B. Shaw, which had extended over twenty years, Chesterton says that all their differences were really religious differences; that Shaw and his followers believed in evolution, that they believed in a great growing tree; but he believed in the flower and the fruit; the fruit is final and in that sense finite, and has been stamped with an image which is its crown and consummation. The mediaeval mystics using the same metaphor called it Fruition; and when this is applied to man it means this:

'That a man has been made more sacred than any superman or supermonkey; that his very limitations have already become holy and like a home; because of that sunken chamber in the rocks, where God became very small.'<sup>11</sup>

The body of Admiral Craven, covered with weeds and green scum has been found in a pool not far from the Inn of The Green Man. The title of the story, The Green Man, seems to have been inevitable. Concerning the dead Admiral's secretary who had had dreams of marrying Olive Craven, but had relinquished them upon finding her to be penniless, Father Brown says:

'Do not be too hard on Mr. Harper. He really had better as well as worse enthusiasms; but he

---

<sup>11</sup> G.K. Chesterton, Autobiography, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1936, p. 232.

ANALYSIS OF THE SCANDAL OF FATHER BROWN SERIES

74

had them all mixed up. There is no harm in having ambitions; but he had ambitions and called them ideals. The old sense of honour taught men to suspect success.. ..The new nine-times-accursed nonsense about Making Good teaches men to identify making good with making money. That was all that was the matter with him; in every other way he was a thoroughly good fellow, and there are thousands like him.<sup>12</sup>

Chesterton the philosopher had written more than twenty years previously:

There is no such thing as Success, or if you like to put it so, there is nothing that is not successful. That a thing is successful, merely means that it is; a millionaire is successful in being a millionaire and a donkey is successful in being a donkey. Any live man has succeeded in living; any dead man may have succeeded in committing suicide.<sup>13</sup>

One wonders if Gilbert Chesterton ever thought whether his own life work could be considered to have been successful from the ordinary point of view. He had wanted to do so much to save the world from its own folly; he had seen with the eyes of a visionary the catastrophe which threatened mankind and he had raised his voice and used his pen to avert it; and how successful had he been?

In The Blast of The Book, Professor Openshaw, a scientific investigator of psychical phenomena is made the victim of a practical joke by his clerk whom the eminent scientist has never really seen as a person; to him Berridge

---

12 G.K. Chesterton, The Green Man in The Scandal of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 644.

13 G.K. Chesterton, The Fallacy of Success in All Things Considered, London, Methuen and Co., 1925, p. 22.

is just a "calculating machine". A wonderful book which supposedly has caused the disappearance of all those who have been daring enough to open it, gives the title to the story. When Openshaw and Father Brown meet by appointment in a restaurant to discuss the matter the former is somewhat surprised to find the priest conversing familiarly with the waiter. When he comments on the fact to Father Brown he receives the reply "Oh, I dine here every two or three months and I talk to him now and then."<sup>14</sup> The Professor who himself dined there practically every day had never even thought of talking to the man.

That is the theme of the story; the scientist who is so preoccupied with his investigations of phenomena is incapable of appreciating the wonder which is his fellowman. To Gilbert Chesterton a man was a marvellous being because each man individually and not only all men collectively had been the motive for the Incarnation - when God Himself became man.

When the priest tells the professor that it is his own clerk, disguised rather clumsily, who has so cleverly fooled him, the latter indignantly refuses to believe it.

'Could you describe him for the police?' asked Father Brown, 'Not you. You probably knew he was clean-shaven and wore tinted glasses. ... You had never seen his eyes any more than his soul; jolly

---

<sup>14</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Blast of The Book in The Scandal of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 628.

laughing eyes. ... You had never looked at him in your life. ... You called him the Calculating Machine, because that was all you ever used him for. You never found out even what a stranger strolling into your office could find out in five minutes' chat: that he was a character; that he was full of antics; that he had all sorts of views on you and on your theories and your reputation for spotting people... You are a great servant of truth and you know that I could never be disrespectful to that. You've seen through a lot of liars, when you put your mind to it. But don't only look at liars. Do occasionally look at honest men - like the waiter.'<sup>15</sup>

We are so accustomed to the marvels (and our neighbour is one of them) that surround us that we no longer see them. In a delightful little essay Chesterton makes this point when he tells a friend that he is going to Battersea via Paris, Belfort, Heidleberg, and Frankfort. He is going to wander over the whole world until somewhere in the seas he comes upon a little island with low green hills and great white cliffs in the heart of which is Battersea. When his friend says

'I suppose it is unnecessary to tell you that this is Battersea.' He answers,

'It is quite unnecessary, and it is quite untrue spiritually. I cannot see any Battersea here; ... I cannot see that door. I cannot see that chair; because a cloud of sleep and custom has come across my eyes.'<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Blast of The Book in The Scandal of Father Brown, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 630.

<sup>16</sup> G.K. Chesterton, quoted by Raymond Bond in The Man Who Was Chesterton, New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1937, p. 103.

In The Scandal of Father Brown, which story gives the title to the whole series, we find the ubiquitous little priest down in South America where he is responsible for uniting an estranged husband with his somewhat frivolous wife. Mr. Rock, a bigoted American journalist completely misinterprets the situation and out of this develops the scandal:

Not much more than half an hour had passed between the time when Rock had telephoned to say the priest was helping the poet to run away with the lady, and the time when he telephoned to say that the priest had prevented the poet from doing precisely the same thing. But in that short interval of time was born and enlarged and scattered upon the winds the Scandal of Father Brown. The truth is still half an hour behind the slander; and nobody can be certain when or where it will catch up with it. ... But Father Brown goes stumping with his stout umbrella through life, liking most of the people in it; accepting the world as his companion, but never as his judge.<sup>17</sup>

In several stories Father Brown condemns Flambeau for stealing precious jewels and convinces him to restore them. But here we find Chesterton pointing out that a man can never recover his reputation destroyed through bigotry or simply through a desire to spread the news.

We believe that we have shown that each one of this group of stories has achieved some particular purpose. G.K. Chesterton once said that he believed that in all literature there was a sort of purpose, that it was meant to go some-

---

<sup>17</sup> G.K. Chesterton, The Scandal of Father Brown in The Scandal of Father Brown Stories, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 603.

where or at least to point somewhere.<sup>18</sup> These tales point somewhere, indeed; they point to truth. Father Brown denounces not only the Communist who is feared, but the Capitalist whom everyone takes for granted. He condemns the false theory of "Making Good", of getting along in the world. He declares that the common man, a clerk, a waiter, is much more wonderful than the abstruse findings of psychical research. We learn that love attuned to the heart of God can make paradise of this earth, while bigotry and narrow-mindedness can work havoc with the reputation of even the most blameless man.

Gilbert Chesterton's philosophy of life coloured everything he wrote. He was a Catholic, and he expresses himself as one. Writing of this particular fact his friend Hilaire Belloc says:

Now here we come to the thing of chief value and of chief effect in Gilbert Chesterton's life and work: his religion. In this department I have a task quite different from the common appreciation of literary style and matter. From a man's religion (or accepted and certain philosophy) all his actions spring, whether he be conscious of that connection or not. In the case of Gilbert Chesterton the whole of whose expression and action were the story of a life's religion, the connection was not only evident to himself but to all around, and even to the general public.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Hilaire Belloc, Chesterton's Place in English Letters, p. 12. London, Sheed and Ward, 1940.

## CONCLUSION

Horace says that the poet is to teach or to please or to do both; he makes the didactic element important though not exclusive. G.K. Chesterton would perhaps have worded this maxim somewhat differently. He probably would have said that a writer should please in order to teach. Now, there are two general methods which an author may use in order to capture and hold the interest of his reading-public: the first is to charm with his wit and humour and the second is to entertain with an interesting story. It is undeniable that everyone does not appreciate the same brand of humour - what is hilariously amusing to one person, may leave another reader completely unmoved. But a story is different; narrative poetry antedates all other types of literature because a story has always appealed to the immortal child that lives in every man. He is perpetually being charmed by the phrase, "Once upon a time," or its equivalent.

Gilbert Chesterton used both of these means to disseminate Truth; but because his essays provoked many a delighted chuckle, and his mystery tales furnished many a satisfying thrill, the gravity of his message was not always understood. And yet he was in deadly earnest because he could not be otherwise whenever his convictions were concerned. On one occasion when someone questioned his seriousness his reply was: "I am always serious, and never more so than when I am joking."

## CONCLUSION

80

We do not say that The Father Brown Stories can be taken too seriously. Many of the plots are fantastic and may easily tax the credulity of the sophisticated reader; but the purpose behind each of them and the general theme are gravely important. Therefore we have analyzed these tales to point out specific instances when the didacticism of G.K. Chesterton speaks through Father Brown. "Thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not adore false gods," states the little priest at different times, and we know that this is serious talk because these statements form part of the Decalogue. When we read that all men matter to God, we know that implicitly contained in these few words are the awe-inspiring dogmas of the Incarnation and the Redemption. Father Brown points out that charity is really charity only when it is extended to those who are completely undeserving; otherwise it is justice, which he declares must be the same for all men, rich and poor, important and unimportant alike. We are treated to a discourse on humility which is more effective than most sermons on that virtue because of the story that is the background. A character study of Mrs. Mandeville, an egoist, "the sort of person who had looked in the mirror before looking out of the window", shows that Chesterton knew human nature well. Father Brown, the true mystic for whom evil takes almost tangible form, distrusts false supernaturalism and its accompanying

## CONCLUSION

81

mystification and remarks that it is the arrant materialist who is most apt to be superstitious.

G.K. Chesterton had taken it upon himself to teach truth; but in order to do this it was necessary to point out those evils of his age which were working the greatest havoc. And so we have Father Brown condemning Communism and Capitalism, the heresies of the day, and we hear him declare that the most serious moral disease is to have lost the sense of sin. Throughout all of these stories we are conscious of the dignity of man and Father Brown speaks of the unforgettable insult offered to three tramps by the reformer "who dared to know them at a glance." The priest condemns those pseudo-scientific methods that interfere with a man's free will, that gift from God which at one and the same time makes his life so dangerous and so glorious too.

Perhaps the literary artist is made subservient to the moralist in The Father Brown Stories; but we do not think so. It is true that these tales do not touch the emotions very deeply, that their appeal is more to the intellect; but it must be remembered that the evils of Chesterton's day were intellectual evils and necessarily had to be combatted as such. But the fundamental truths embodied in a story do not destroy the literary value of it. Arthur Machen in Literature The Channel of Culture says,

## CONCLUSION

82

You ask me for a new test - or rather for a new expression of the one test - that separates literature from the mass of stuff which is not literature. I will give you a test that will startle you: literature is the expression, through the aesthetic medium of words, of the dogmas of the Catholic Church, and that which in any way is out of harmony with these dogmas is not literature. ... I tell you that unless you have assimilated the final dogmas, the eternal truths upon which those things rest, consciously if you please, but subconsciously of necessity, you can never write literature, however clever and amusing you may be. Think of it and you will see that from the literary standpoint, Catholic dogma is merely the witness, under a special symbolism, of the enduring facts of human nature and the universe; it is merely the voice that tells us distinctly that man is not the creature of the drawing-room and the Stock Exchange, but a lonely, awful, soul, confronted by the Source of all souls, and you will realize that to make literature, it is necessary to be at all events subconsciously Catholic.<sup>1</sup>

Chesterton knew with certainty the enduring facts of human nature and the universe, and he knew too, that in the final analysis man is a lonely creature; that in all the really important things he must always stand alone. Using his God-given free will he must make his own decision and his own choice in the awful instant of time, a decision and a choice upon which depends his happiness for eternity. Chesterton knew all these things, and because he had that knowledge he could never use his great talent to write stories that would serve only as an escape from the strain and boredom of

---

<sup>1</sup> Arthur Machen, Hieroglyphics in Literature The Channel of Culture, by Francis X. Connolly, New York, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1952, p. 139.

## CONCLUSION

83

daily living. His tales were of men, and men for him were never dull; men were never commonplace. Each and every man held within himself the power to reach sublime heights; but there was too the possibility that he would misuse that power and thus sink to terrible depths.

Because the detective stories of G.K. Chesterton deal with these fundamental facts we believe that they serve more than the purpose of entertainment, that they are more than an escape for the reader from his hum-drum or exacting daily life, but that they are an escape to the breath-taking eternal verities so cleverly enclosed within the pages of The Father Brown Stories.

FINIS

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Belloc, Hilaire, On The Place of Gilbert Chesterton In English Letters, London, Sheed & Ward, 1940, p. 5-84.

A brief criticism of G.K. Chesterton the writer.

Bond, Raymond, The Man Who Was Chesterton, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1937, p. v-801.

An anthology of what the editor considers to be the best works of G.K. Chesterton.

Bullet, Gerald, The Innocence of G.K. Chesterton, London, Cecil Palmer, 1923, p. vii-233.

A criticism of G.K. Chesterton as Defender of the Faith.

Cammaerts, Emile, The Laughing Prophet, London, Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1937, p. xii-248.

A sympathetic criticism of G.K. Chesterton by his friend.

Chesterton, G.K., All Things Considered, London, Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1925, p. 2-296.

A book of essays.

....., Autobiography, London, Hutchison & Company, 1952, p. v-355.

....., Come To Think of It, London, Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1930, p. vii-243.

A reprint of essays which had already appeared in the Illustrated London News.

....., The Everlasting Man, London, Hodden & Stoughton, 1925, p. 5-320.

Its thesis is that those who attempt to say that the religion founded by Christ stands side by side with other religions are only repeating a stale formula contradicted by a very striking fact.

....., The Father Brown Stories, London, Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1947, p. 9-704.

A collection of all the Father Brown stories. The book is divided into sections bearing the headings: The Innocence of Father Brown, The Wisdom of Father Brown, The Incredulity of Father Brown, The Secret of Father Brown, and The Scandal of Father Brown. It is this work that is referred to throughout this thesis.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

85

- ....., Heretics, London, John Lane, 1912, p. 11-305.  
Discussion of the false philosophies of G.K. Chesterton's day.
- ....., Orthodoxy, London, John Lane, 1908, p. vii-299.
- ....., The Thing, London, Sheed & Ward, 1929, p. 5-255.  
A book of essays, controversial in tone, answering attacks on the Catholic Church.
- ....., Varied Types, New York, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1909, p. 3-269.  
A discussion and criticism of different writers.
- Connolly, Francis X., ed., Literature The Channel of Culture, New York, Harcourt Bruce, 1952, p. xvi-714.
- Collins, Dorothy, ed., Selected Essays of G.K. Chesterton, London, Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1949, p. v-310.  
According to E.C. Bentley in the introduction, Dorothy Collins provides here a quintessence of Chesterton the essayist.
- Eliot, T.S., Selected Prose, ed., John Hayward, London, Penguin Book Ltd., 1953, p. 5-253.
- Haycroft, Howard, The Life and Times of the Detective Story, New York, D. Appelton-Century Co., 1941, p. vii-409.  
Discusses the birth, past, present, and future of the detective story in America, England and on the continent.
- ....., Art of the Mystery Story, London, Gallancz, 1929.
- Hemphill, Basil, O.S.B., The Joy of Serving God, London, Herder Book Co., 1951, p. v-194.
- Kenner, H., Paradox in Chesterton, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1947, p. xi-156.  
Presents Chesterton as a master of analogical perception and argument.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

86

Maline, Julian L., Prose and Poetry of England, Syracuse, N.Y., 1949, p. v-882.

One of the Thomas More series of anthologies.

O'Connor, John, Father Brown on Chesterton, London, Burns, Oates, 1937.

Sheen, Fulton J., Philosophy of Religion, New York, Appelton-Century-Crofts, 1948, p. v-409.

A book to show the relationship between human reason and religion. It evaluates the impact of modern thought on religion.

Ward, Maisie, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1942, p. v-685.

....., Return to Chesterton, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1952, p. v-336.

West, Julius, G.K. Chesterton, Critical Study, London, Martin Secker, 1915, p. ii-190.

ARTICLES

Chesterton, G.K., "The Novel With A Purpose", America, February 19, 1927, Vol. XXVI.

Connell, Ed. A., "Gilbert Chesterton - A Criticism", Columbia, June 1944.

Shuster, George, "G.K. Chesterton", The Commonweal, July 24, 1936, Vol. XXIV.

Queen, Ellery, "The Detective Short Story", Saturday Review, November 22, 1941, Vol. XXIV, No. 51.

## ABSTRACT

Didacticism in the Father Brown Stories attempts to show that in these detective tales by G.K. Chesterton there is a value over and above mere entertainment. For the purpose of this study, didacticism is interpreted as instruction, that is, as a derivative of didactic, which Webster defines as, fitted or intended to teach.

A brief review of the tradition of the detective story is made, establishing the fact that the origin of this type of literature goes back into the distant past; examples of it can be found in the Old Testament of the Bible. Nevertheless, to Edgar Allan Poe in the nineteenth century, has been given the title of Father of the Detective Story. He has been followed by a long line of successors, many of whom, especially in the twentieth century, are writers of high scholarship. Among these we find Gilbert K. Chesterton, whose diminutive clerical sleuth is a well-known character in the world of detective fiction.

An analysis of thirty-eight of the forty-eight stories in the Father Brown collection is made - to use more seemed unnecessary. Father Brown is shown to uphold the moral law in unequivocal terms; he stresses the inherent dignity of man; he emphasizes the distinction between justice and charity; he discourses on Christian humility; he shows us the hateful picture of the true egoist; he points out the evils of commun-

## ABSTRACT

88

ism and capitalism; he declares most emphatically that the most serious disease of modern times is the loss of the sense of sin; and always he upholds the doctrine of free will and the responsibility of man for his actions. All of these examples point undeniably to the fact that G.K. Chesterton made use of this literary genre to teach the fundamental truths. By referring to the author's autobiography and to a number of his essays it is shown that Chesterton's philosophy, which is the Catholic philosophy of life, is the same in these lighter works of fiction as in his other prose works.

No attempt is made in this thesis to give a literary evaluation of the Father Brown stories. The purpose of this study is solely to show that these tales can legitimately be interpreted as doing more than entertaining; that they teach the eternal verities which were so important to Gilbert Chesterton that he makes use of every literary medium at his disposal in order to disseminate them among men.