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ON WONDER IN CHESTERTON

by

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INTRODUCTION

It is a stimulating and pleasurable occupation to spend some time peering over the shoulder of an excellent artist, a man with the "anima naturaliter Christiana", and watching how he portrays with keen insight a very important and comprehensive element that goes into the picture of his ideal modern man. This is the burden of the following pages, in which we shall follow Chesterton throughout all his diversified books, attempting to discover what he considered the various components of wonder. Our investigation will be concerned also with the effects of wonder, the means to attain it, its enemies, and the devices by which we may vanquish these enemies.

The section on the enemies of wonder contains a rather complete picture of his teachings on the epistomological problem in connection with scepticism and relativism as enemies of wonder; and of his teachings on ontology in connection with pessimism and the problem of evil. Most of the remainder of the paper belongs to the realm of moral philosophy or sociology with a fraction in the field of psychology. We have tried to incorporate all his important thought on every subject connected with wonder as we found it scattered through his numerous books.

Chesterton considered wonder an important factor badly needed in proper modern living. How important he considered

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wonder may be seen from a passage in the first chapter of one of his most important books, Orthodoxy: "This . . . seems to me the main problem for philosophers . . . . How can we contrive to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it?"(1) The moral aspect of his search for wonder is expressed in an excerpt from another chapter: "One must somehow find a way of loving the world without trusting it; somehow one must love the world without being worldly."(2)

Chesterton made it his life's labor of love to spread the seeds of wonder far and wide. Despite this fact, however, he never wrote any formal philosophical disquisition about it. Yet his works are pervaded with the notion and its accompanying ramifications. What we have tried to do, therefore, is to gather together the pieces of the mosaic that he has prepared and try to fit them with some precision into a valid, logical, and comprehensible picture of the tree of wonder, with all its roots and branches.

This task has been complicated by the enormous bulk of his writing; counting his co-authorships, his published books number well over one hundred. (We felt that these would be sufficient to obtain an adequate picture of his thought, even apart from newspaper and magazine articles.)

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, p. 15.

(2) Ibid., p. 144.

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Another difficulty has been that Chesterton was very flexible in his use of terms. For the most part he expressed his philosophical thoughts without attempting to be very precise or to couch them in strictly philosophical terms. It was his disdain of intellectual pride, his hatred of "showing-off" which stemmed from his boyhood environment and the attitude of the boys at his school, that probably aided in the formation of this attitude. Another reason was his endeavor to be understood by everyone. He was very democratic in his relations with all, and would, as we know, argue with anyone. He well understood the need of precision in terms; and, although we see that he could have used the commonly accepted philosophical term for a thing, many a time he preferred to express himself in the more commonly understandable way - a method which put his ideas across to the common man. Yet we cannot accuse him of using the wrong term; it was simply that he wanted to use a simpler term. He resented the practice of some scientists who, he said, "are perpetually trying to bluff us with big words and learned allusions . . . ."(3) Partly because of a revulsion against such practices, then, and partly because of a certain native tendency, perhaps, he was inclined to put the deepest philosophical notions into the most elementary terms. He himself submits a reason for this procedure:

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(3) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Thing, pp. 82-83.

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> It arises from the moderns having dealt so much in moods and emotions, especially in the arts, that they have developed a large but loose vocabulary, which deals more with atmosphere than with actual attitude or position . . . . This modern moodiness has its value, though the moderns overrate it; just as medieval logic had its value, though it was overrated in the later Middle Ages. But the point is that to explain the medievals to the moderns, we must often use this modern language of mood.(4)

For example, Chesterton calls the spirit of St. Thomas one of Optimism, "which is something quite primary . . . and which can now only be expressed by a rather cheap journalistic term which he would probably have thought quite senseless."(5) Because of this peculiar terminology we have permitted Chesterton, as much as possible, to speak for himself on the following pages, being content to maintain some orderly connection in what he says, and leaving to the reader the "translation" of his words into more exacting philosophical terminology. To attempt to paraphrase his texts in more precise wording would have drawn this study into interminable lengths. The main objective was, we hope, accomplished without this: to present to the reader an accurate picture of Chesterton's doctrine on wonder with some evaluation; to formulate the whole "philosophy of wonder."

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(4) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. 130-131.

(5) Ibid., p. 131.

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We have made extensive use of many quotations from his works because of the above reason; but also because of sad experience in reading the works of critics or expounders of Chesterton. Sometimes we have found there is much difficulty and doubt involved in attempting to discover just when you are reading the commentators' reflections or interpretations, and when you are reading the thought of Chesterton himself. This difficulty is obviated by using direct quotation as much as possible.

One more caution is in order. Without entering into any discussion about the existence or non-existence of a Christian philosophy as such, it is necessary to note that for Chesterton this was not even a question. It was taken for granted: "In this story the philosophy did depend on the theology . . . ."(6) He says this of Thomistic philosophy:

> This great intellectual creation was a Christian and Catholic creation, and cannot be understood as anything else. It was Aquinas who baptized Aristotle when Aristotle could not have baptized Aquinas; it was a purely Christian miracle which raised the great pagan from the dead.(7)

To present his case on wonder in a formal organized manner was not what one would expect of Chesterton. It was not his nature, as they say. But someone should; and perhaps we should quote Chesterton himself to justify our

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(6) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 136.

(7) Ibid.

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present attempt; for he said: "Whatever is worth doing, is worth doing badly."

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CHAPTER ONE

CHESTERTON THE PHILOSOPHER

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LIFE OF CHESTERTON

Chesterton was born in London, May 29, 1874. Gilbert Keith was the son of a prosperous auctioneer, who was considered in those days to be of the upper middle class. In politics the family was of the Liberal Party. In religion they were Unitarian.

Gilbert's secondary education was received at St. Paul's School, where it seems from reports about his school life that he was not such a shining light in his studies, but that he showed glimpses of his genius in his extracurricular activities. One reason for his lack of outstanding achievement in his class studies was his natural absent-mindedness; another was his schoolboy horror of "showing off". He had, however, free reign to permit his growing talent to appear outside of class, especially in his endeavors in what was called the "Junior Debating Club", a group established by him and a few of his friends. After St. Paul's he did not go on to university, but studied art at the Slade School of Art.

He gradually turned to journalism as a career, beginning with work in a publisher's office and then building up a name for himself by free-lance writing. He gained special

notice by his opposition to the Boer War. This opposition was expressed in a weekly paper called The Speaker. He wrote also for a large London Liberal daily called The Daily News.

In 1900 he published two books of poems: the one was a comic verse book entitled Greybeards at Play and the other was called The Wild Knight.

In 1901 he was writing regularly for The Daily News. In that year, on June 28th, he married Francis Blogg; and the same year he met George Bernard Shaw, with whom he was to carry on a lifelong debate. He was also a friend of Hilaire Belloc.

In 1901 he published his first book of collected essays, The Defendant. These were previously published in The Speaker. In 1902 he published his first book of art criticism, G. F. Watts. In 1905 came his first fictional work, The Club of Queer Trades, a number of short stories built about a central theme. In 1904 came his first novel, The Napoleon of Notting Hill. It was in 1910 that he produced his first book of social opinion, What's Wrong With the World?.

In 1904 he met Father John O'Connor, who was to receive him into the Catholic Church many years later. In 1909 he left London for Beaconsfield, where he lived the rest of his life.

He was associated in newspaper work with his brother,

Cecil, and with Hilaire Belloc. The paper was called the Eye Witness from 1911 to 1912, then the New Witness until 1923, when the name was changed to G. K.'s Weekly until the time of his death in 1936, when the name became the Weekly Review.

In 1913 he was involved in the famous Marconi case, which ended with his brother Cecil being judged guilty and receiving a penalty. The case dealt with Chestertonian efforts to fight government corruption. Cecil died at the end of the war and Gilbert felt an obligation to continue publication of the review.

In 1915 he became very ill and evinced an interest in entering the Catholic Church. In 1919 he visited Palestine, in 1920 Italy, in 1921 the United States. In 1922 he entered the Catholic Church. In 1923 he wrote his book on St. Francis of Assisi. In 1930 he made another visit to the United States.

He delivered lectures frequently, especially after 1922. He wrote his famous St. Thomas Aquinas in 1933. He died in 1936.

He wrote essays, comic verse, serious poetry, detective stories, sociological treatises, biography, art criticism, literary criticism, history, political articles, anthropology, archeology, philosophy, and theology.

Physically he was corpulent, no lover of exercise,

fond of drink, alcoholic or otherwise.

His religious history shows that he was an atheist at the age of twelve after being raised a Unitarian, that he was an agnostic at the age of sixteen, that he became a High-church Anglican due to his interest in and subsequent marriage to Frances, and finally that he became a Catholic in 1922.

His political beliefs are best expressed by himself in As I Was Saying, wherein he tells us:

> I am myself a Liberal without any Liberal Party; a Little-Englander in the sense that I care more about England than about Newfoundland or Tasmania; a Radical in all my instincts in the general social quarrels of our plutocracy; an ex-Socialist . . . a sort of revolutionist . . . ; a Distributist . . . a disreputable demagogic sort of person, holding that most reforms are too slow rather than too fast . . . .(1)

WORKS OF CHESTERTON

We do, of course, present a bibliography in its proper place, but we make no comprehensive survey of his works here, because this has already been done by various writers. Some of the most important Chestertonian works are the following: Heretics, Orthodoxy, What's Wrong With the World?, The Everlasting Man, The Outline of Sanity, Collected Poems, St. Thomas Aquinas, and his Autobiography. From the standpoint of content and not necessarily of style

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, p. 104.

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it seems to this writer that the following books are the most important in the field of fiction: The Napoleon of Notting Hill, The Man Who Was Thursday, The Ball and the Cross, and Manalive.

There are those who feel that Chesterton is most important as a poet, others as a sociologist, still others as a detective-story writer. We are interested in his philosophy. Much of this is found in his books of essays. It is difficult to say that this or that book of essays is the best or most important, because it would involve a judicious weighing of the amount of good material in essays of varying value in each book. Probably one of the most meaty is the one entitled The Well and the Shallows.

Practically all of Chesterton's published books have been read in the preparation of this thesis, as well as much material written about Chesterton and his writings.

CHESTERTON'S CONVERSION

In connection with Chesterton's philosophy, his conversion is obviously of importance. His conversion was spectacular, not in the sense that it was not a natural development in his life, but spectacular insofar as it was not expected or even believed in by many non-Catholics in England. The hand of Providence, it seems, is to be seen in the fact that this conversion was delayed as it was; for many who listened and benefited at that time and after

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would not have listened before he had become a great man and a great writer in his own right before his conversion. The opposition of the world to what is Catholic was not there to hinder his message from being heard. We said above that his conversion was a natural development in his life. Belloc writes: "Few of the great conversions in our history have been so deliberate or so mature."(2) Lea, who writes so much nonsense in his book about Chesterton, including the phrase calling Chesterton's conversion his "first great error", still has this to say about his conversion:

> Nevertheless it was, in a sense, inevitable. He had one of the most naturally Catholic minds that have appeared in England during this century. That is to say, not only was he naturally religious, in the highest sense, and therefore bound to be attracted by the magnificent breadth and almost unlimited provisions of the Roman Catholic Church; but he was inclined from the first to submit his conscience to authority.(3)

Pfleger, in his Wrestlers with Christ has a chapter on Chesterton in which he states: "Before he left the Anglican Church for the Catholic he had held . . . many Catholic beliefs and when he became a Catholic had almost nothing to alter of his old outlook on the world."(4) The reason

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(2) Hilaire BELLOC, On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton in English Letters, p. 13.

(3) F. A. LEA, The Wild Knight of Battersea: G. K. Chesterton, p. 19.

(4) Karl PFLEGER, Wrestlers with Christ, pp. 165-166.

Pfleger gives for his conversion was that:

> He knew by direct intuition that life is literally a Divine miracle bestowed on man and was determined . . . to do everything in his power to make the full realization and enjoyment of this marvel possible for himself and others.(5)

Father O'Connor, who received Chesterton into the Church, translates a French interview in his book about Chesterton. In this interview the new convert is quoted as saying: "'Before arriving at Catholicism I passed through different stages and was a long time struggling. The various stages are hard to explain in detail. After much study and reflection, I came to the conclusion that the ills from which England is suffering . . . are the result of England not being Catholic.'"(6) He goes on to say that "'Catholicism gives us a doctrine, puts logic into our life. It is not merely a Church Authority, it is a base which steadies the judgment.'"(7) He maintains that to be a Catholic is: "'To own an irrefragable metaphysic on which to base all one's judgments, to be the touchstone of our ideas and our life, to which one can bring everything home.'"(8) Father O'Connor goes on to show in further quotes from Mr.

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(5) Karl PFLEGER, Wrestlers With Christ, pp. 165-166.

(6) John O'CONNOR, Father Brown on Chesterton, p. 138.

(7) Ibid.

(8) Ibid., p. 139.

Chesterton, that the big question was whether the Church of England could claim direct descent from the medieval Catholic Church. Chesterton decided it could not. Furthermore, "'I have no use for a Church which is not a Church militant, which cannot order battle and fall in line and march in the same direction.'"(9)

Chesterton himself, in more than one place, tells us about his conversion. In his Autobiography he tells us that he was brought up among people who were Unitarians and Universalists, at the same time others were becoming agnostics or atheists. He says there were really two groups, the Optimists and the Pessimists. He was at first inclined to Pessimism, but then followed a "poetic orator", Stopford Brooke, and accepted optimistic theism like MacDonald's - Universalism - a sort of optimistic Calvinism.(10) He then came in contact with various sects and movements and was drawn to the conclusion that it all amounted to a lot of "scatter-brained thinking", amid which "I began to piece together the fragments of the old religious scheme; mainly by the various gaps that denoted its disappearance. And the more I saw of real human nature, the more I came to suspect that it was really rather bad for all these people that it

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(9) John O'CONNOR, Father Brown on Chesterton, p. 141.

(10) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, pp. 172-173.

had disappeared."(11)

Chesterton now wrote the book Heretics in which he attacked various false thinkers. Then, challenged for a positive side, he wrote Orthodoxy. When we read this book, we know he was a "natural Catholic". He gives us further insight into his conversion in what he called his "six conversions" in The Well and the Shallows. The reasons he gives there for becoming a Catholic are: the fact that Protestantism had become a religion of fossils, staying the same only outwardly; that it was contrary to real progress and democracy; that it had surrendered on matters of sex, divorce, and birth control; that the prayer-book problem in the Church of England was settled by Parliament, which could be composed of any kind of person, including atheists; that materialism had collapsed, considering the works of Sir Eddington, the story of Lourdes, psychoanalysis, all of which showed that there was nothing so fixed about science; that the case of Spain showed the hypocrisy of many; and that the questions in general were deep and the modern answers were shallow.(12) In Orthodoxy he tells us that he was made a convert by the enemies of the Church and their contradictory criticisms of it.(13)

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(11) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, p. 177.

(12) IDEM, The Well and the Shallows, p. 23ff.

(13) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 156ff.

The main points we are interested in so far as his conversion is concerned are: first, the resulting Catholic philosophical attitude; and second, the manifestation by his conversion of his consistency of thought throughout life, of which we want to say a special word below. But first we want to conclude these notes on his life with some statements about his special qualities and virtues.

CHESTERTON'S CHARACTER

Putting together a composite picture of his traits as outlined by various writers, we find the following description of Chesterton's character:

> I found a mind which is unafraid of its own convictions, yet tolerant of the convictions of others . . . . assurance without vanity, self-confidence without arrogance.(14) /He/ loved company, enjoyed a rousing song . . . drank good beer when he could get it . . . . would talk with anybody in a pub, either sense or nonsense . . . . His laughter could be heard several houses away. He was a sort of Falstaff in bulk and wit . . . . (15) He was impatient of all ambiguous nonsense, but it was in his nature to leave it aside rather than to transfix it with ridicule or invective . . . . he made no enemies.(16) He understood all men . . . and in particular his countrymen . . . . (17) He loved

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(14) Andrue BERDING, Gilbert Keith Chesterton: An Interview in America, vol. 36, no. 13 (Jan. 8, 1927), p. 306.

(15) Hesketh PEARSON, G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc in The Listener, (June 28, 1956), p. 886.

(16) Hilaire BELLOC, On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton in English Letters, p. 30.

(17) Ibid., p. 74.

his fellow-men.(18) He preserved throughout the deepest respect and consideration for his adversary's point of view.(19) When he could not praise, he remained silent.(20) Let me point out his terrible power of invective, not generally understood, because he seldom used it. And let us be again thankful for the fine charity which kept that weapon sheathed.(21) He forgave . . . because he understood . . . . (22) He is a man and not a pedant, a completely natural and unaffected man with an unrestrained delight in existence . . . and all the lovely . . . things which God has stored in the homely vessel of our normal and ordinary experience on earth, in everyday life and the average man. There is nothing more stupid, nothing more culpable than to despise the average man. Chesterton loves him, defends him and sings his praises, because the average man is man as such . . . . (23) /Maisie Ward writes of his/ . . . fairness of mind which made it so hard for him to be a party man . . . ; (24) . . . the genius of his insight . . . (25) Gilbert was a very faithful friend: it would be hard to find a broken friendship in his life.(25)

Ward calls him a mystic.(26) She speaks of his charity to others, saying that he possessed "that note so special to him, so embarrassing to some of his admirers, of deep and

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(18) Hilaire BELLOC, On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton in English Letters, p. 79.

(19) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 39.

(20) Ibid., p. 40.

(21) John O'CONNOR, Father Brown on Chesterton, p. 13.

(22) F. A. LEA, The Wild Knight of Battersea, p. 88.

(23) Karl PFLEGER, Wrestlers With Christ, p. 163.

(24) Maisie WARD, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 290.

(25) Ibid., p. 327.

(26) Ibid., p. 482.

genuine respect for every person and every opinion."(27) She quotes memories written by one of Gilbert's younger friends, Douglas Woodruff; "'No man more naturally distinguished between a man and his views, or found easier the theological injunction to hate the sin but love the sinner.'"(28) Ward says: "He excelled in the soft answer - not that answer which seeming soft subtly provokes to wrath, but the genuine article. Belloc says of him that he possessed 'the two virtues of humility and charity' - those most royal of Christian virtues. In the heat of argument he retained a fairness of mind that saw his opponent's case and would never turn an argument into a quarrel. And most people both liked him and felt that he liked them."(29) "He once said that it was impossible to hate anything except an idea, and to him I think it was."(30) Ward quotes Shaw as saying: "'He is friendly, easy-going, unaffected, gentle, magnanimous, and genuinely democratic.'"(31) She quotes an extra secretary as writing: "'He was of all men the most courteous . . . . '"(32) "'I never saw him lose

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(27) Maisie WARD, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 516.

(28) Ibid., p. 557.

(29) Ibid., pp. 595-596.

(30) Ibid., p. 607.

(31) Maisie WARD, The Return to Chesterton, p. 61.

(32) Ibid., p. 178.

his temper . . . . '"(33) Clare Nicholl is quoted as saying: "'Unkindness or uncharitable gossip . . . were the things that made him angry . . . . '"(34)

Belloc numbers six characteristics of Chesterton. He was patriotic, precise in thought, adept at parallelisms and comparisons, more literary than historical, a man of charity, and a man of faith.(35)

What about his faults? He himself tells us what he thinks they were. He felt that pride was not one of his faults, but that laziness and certain kinds of anger were his weaknesses.(36) In view of his many eulogies on drink, it is perhaps judicious to mention that Ward quotes his doctor as saying that Chesterton was never an alcoholic.(37)

As a final word regarding Chesterton's character, we want to mention without comment the names of the nations he liked and disliked, as these are of some aid in understanding him. He liked the English, first of all, being a great patriot - but he was a true patriot in recognizing the faults of England as well. He liked the French, the Irish,

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(33) Maisie WARD, The Return to Chesterton, p. 178.

(34) Ibid., p. 236.

(35) Hilaire BELLOC, On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton in English Letters, pp. 14-16.

(36) Maisie WARD, The Return to Chesterton, p. 298.

(37) Maisie WARD, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 666.

the Americans, and the Spanish. He was unfavorable in his attitude toward the Jews, the Prussians, the Japanese; and perhaps to the Negroes, the Italians, the Russians, and the Chinese. He would never admit hating anyone. Let us take his word for it.

CHESTERTON'S STYLE

We must say something about his style because of its importance in his writings - a very special importance because of the praise and the criticism it has received and the difference the acceptance of his style makes in the acceptance of his views.

There were some who disliked his extensive use of paradox. Gerald Bullett, the author of The Innocence of G. K. Chesterton, thinks it is used excessively.(38) A New York Times writer opines as follows: "What is surprising is the realization that the once admired 'paradoxical' style has become an obstacle to understanding . . . . it is hard to tell when Chesterton has made a bullseye, and when he is begging the question in a cloud of words."(39) Another writer feels that his paradoxical style is an

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(38) Gerald BULLETT, The Innocence of G. K. Chesterton, p. 6.

(39) Delancey FERGUSON, "Speaking of Books", in the New York Times Book Review, Vol. 55, No. 32, Section 7, (Aug. 6, 1950), p. 2.

obstacle to greater research in Chesterton's works:

> Now I have always felt that of all our modern Catholic writers, Chesterton, master of the paradox, has been in great danger of becoming, paradoxically enough, the most-quoted but least-analyzed. Perhaps the years since his death have not been sufficient to have fostered the mellow development of Chestertonian research; perhaps there is still the feeling in Catholic educational circles that Chesterton is too "difficult", too "tricky"; that his writings are complex and gymnastic.(40)

We fail to see the truth of this charge. The use of paradox, at least to this reader of Chestertonian works, has always added to the enjoyment of the reading; and it requires no excessive concentration to grasp the meaning. Belloc defends the use of paradox in Chesterton. He writes:

> His most concise and epigrammatic judgments are often taken as mere verbal exploits, and the half-educated and uncultured, who are of the stuff by which modern opinion is ruled, use of him the term "paradoxical", in that special meaning of their own which they give to this word, meaning "nonsense through contradiction"; not the original and cultured meaning of "paradox": "illumination through an unexpected juxtaposition".(41)

Belloc goes on to praise the clarity of Gilbert's writings: "The heart of his style is lucidity, produced by a complete rejection of ambiguity: complete exactitude of definition."(42)

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(40) Edward A. CONNELL, Chesterton's Answers to Some $64 Questions in Columbia, (June, 1944), p. 21.

(41) Hilaire BELLOC, On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton in English Letters, p. 21.

(42) Ibid., p. 34.

For a more complete discussion of Chesterton's use of paradox there will be found a justification of the method in the special book on the subject written by Hugh Kenner.(43) Even in the work of Lea, a critic of many Chestertonian aspects, we can find a defense of his style regarding the use of paradox.(44)

The second most generally noted characteristic of the writings of Chesterton is his optimistic and cheerful spirit. "One would have thought that his universe was the scene of public merry-makings, where the believer had the duty of taking an active part in the rejoicings."(45) "Mr. Chesterton follows a fine literary tradition in using laughter as a cleansing sword swift and lethal as lightning."(46) Another writer says that Chesterton "became possessed of a mood of thanksgiving and spiritual energy which was as surely an emanation of Christian Joy in him as it ever was in any man."(47) Christopher Hollis in his

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(43) Paradox in Chesterton. See bibliography.

(44) F. A. LEA, The Wild Knight of Battersea, pp. 36ff.

(45) Raymond LAS VERGNAS, Chesterton, Belloc, Baring, p. 40.

(46) Gerald BULLETT, The Innocence of G. K. Chesterton, p. 14.

(47) Maurice B. RECKITT, G. K. Chesterton, A Christian Prophet for England Today, p. 13.

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excellent book on Chesterton criticizes (wrongly, I think) the "too exuberant optimism" of Chesterton.(48) He agrees with an Irish critic who thought that such optimism was absurd in the face of all the tragedies of life. A comprehensive reading of Chesterton dealing with the problem of evil will give the reader the answer to this charge. This problem will be treated later in this paper.

Other characteristics of Chesterton's writings which are mentioned by various authors are: the fact that he telescopes his syllogisms(49); that he finds new arguments for old beliefs(50); that he is a "man of battle" and has a "noble militancy" in his writings(51); that he "loves a good fighter . . . and to such he is always just."(52); and that he perhaps has a "certain irresponsibility about his language" when he speaks of the exuberance of fighting for a good cause.(53) Palmer mentions as characteristics

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(48) Christopher HOLLIS, G. K. Chesterton, p. 7.

(49) Raymond LAS VERGNAS, Chesterton, Belloc, Baring, p. 138.

(50) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 181.

(51) Gerald BULLETT, Innocence, p. 209.

(52) Julius WEST, G. K. Chesterton, A Critical Study, p. 85.

(53) Maurice B. RECKITT, G. K. Chesterton, p. 31.

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of Chesterton's school "robustiousness, rapture, medievalism, Roman Catholic Christianity, the exaltation of the humble and homely, traditional music, the cult of the tavern, songs of liberty."(54)

APPRECIATIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF THE HISTORICAL PLACE OF CHESTERTON

Many of the following quotations from persons attempting an evaluation of Chesterton's worth may seem to exagerate his proper status; but the more one reads his books and catches his spirit, the more one is inclined to agree with some of the most enthusiastic admirers.

Let us begin with his lifelong antagonist, George Bernard Shaw, who calls Chesterton "'a man of colossal genius'".(55) Next we have A. G. Gardiner, who says Chesterton is "a wayfarer from the ages, stopping at the inn of life, warming himself at the fire and making the rafters ring with his jolly laughter . . . . He is not of our time, but of all times."(56) A journalist calls him "perhaps the most versatile and unusual figure in the present century."(57)

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(54) Herbert PALMER, Post-Victorian Poetry, p. 159.

(55) Maisie WARD, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 367.

(56) A. G. GARDINER, Prophets, Priests, and Kings, pp. 331-332.

(57) P. E., An Attic Salt-Shaker in The Ottawa Journal, (April 26, 1952).

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One of the most severe critics of Chesterton writes: "As my understanding of him has grown, and my imagination been enriched by it, so has my admiration. Now that this essay is finished, I see him towering before me, a figure of portentous stature . . . . "(58).

Two writers express their personal appreciation for his special service to them. Reckitt writes: "If I did not owe my faith to Chesterton I did, I think, owe to him the beginnings of a capacity to relate that faith to anything else . . . . "(59) Cammaerts, too, is in debt to him: "He rendered me the immense service of restoring my balance and planting my feet if not on the rock, at least on healthy, solid earth."(60)

Bryant considers Chesterton the outstanding man of his generation. "If from his generation one had to select the name of one man who might have stood as type of Don Quixote or St. George who slew the dragon, it was he. If any literary name of our age becomes a legend transcending letters, it will, I believe, be his."(61) Reilly says that "Chesterton had the distinction of being the most versatile and

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(58) F. A. LEA, The Wild Knight of Battersea, p. 92.

(59) Maurice B. RECKITT, G. K. Chesterton, A Christian Prophet for England Today, p. 9.

(60) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 228.

(61) Arthur BRYANT, in Preface to The Glass Walking-Stick by G. K. Chesterton, p. vii.

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brilliant English writer of his day."(62) Dudley writes: "For people who do not love him (if such there are) there is no hope."(63) Pfleger speaks of his talent as "divine or at least a special gift of grace."(64) He says: "I can but affirm my conviction that if Chesterton did not exist the contemporary world would lack not simply a remarkable philosopher, or an indispensible man of letters, but a remarkable and indispensible man."(65)

Reckitt's appraisal of the man was this: "If we take that ancient synonym for the word 'prophet' and call Chesterton a Seer we best describe what he most essentially was."(66)

Maisie Ward itemizes a number of comments by various respectable writers and summarizes the findings thus: "Glancing through these and many other verdicts one is struck by two facts: a universal agreement that Chesterton is a very great man: the widest disagreement as to wherein that greatness lay."(67)

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(62) Joseph J. REILLY, Of Books and Men, p. 60.

(63) Owen F. DUDLEY, in Foreword to A Chesterton Catholic Anthology, compiled by Patrick Baybrooke, p. ix.

(64) Karl PFLEGER, Wrestlers With Christ, p. 159.

(65) Ibid., pp. 161-162.

(66) Maurice B. RECKITT, G. K. Chesterton, A Christian Prophet for England Today, p. 38.

(67) Maisie WARD, The Return to Chesterton, p. xiv.

Theodore Maynard is supreme in his compliments: "Though in all probability he will never be canonized, his goodness was almost overwhelming." "I think he was a saint; I am sure that he was a genius."(68)

Las Vergnas also comments on his spirituality:

> May I end this section with a tremendous, comprehensive and transcendent word - Holiness. I have heard it used, but in whispers, privately, by friends who wept with most painful yet not despondent tears at his funeral, or afterwards. I have always wished, myself, to make use of it. Pious - we knew that: orthodox - that was obvious: but "holy" - aking to the Saints? Dare we say that? Enough to have asked ourselves whether it should not especially be that we ought to say.(69)

Father O'Connor prophecies: "His triumph shall be sung by some yet unmoulded tongue, far on in summers that we shall not see."(70)

The words that Chesterton himself applied to Samuel Johnson can well be applied to Chesterton himself: "The world will always return to him, almost as it returns to Aristotle; because he also judged all things with a gigantic and detached good sense."(71)

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(68) Theodore MAYNARD, Of Overwhelming Goodness in The New York Times Book Review, (March 2, 1952), p. 33.

(69) Raymond LAS VERGNAS, Chesterton, Belloc, Baring, p. 142.

(70) John O'CONNOR, Father Brown on Chesterton, p. 149.

(71) Alice MEYNELL and G. K. CHESTERTON, Samuel Johnson, p. xix.

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Maisie Ward tells us that "a noted psychologist, asked to define sanity, simply said: 'Read Chesterton.'"(72)

CHESTERTON AS A PHILOSOPHER

When the name of Chesterton is mentioned, the first thought about him is of Chesterton the essayist or Chesterton the poet or Chesterton the distributist, or, for most people, Chesterton, the author of the Father Brown detective stories. Chesterton's output was so enormous that he can justly be put into these or into other categories; but we are especially interested in Chesterton the philosopher.

Can Chesterton be properly termed a philosopher? There is no doubt that he can. His philosophical thought, though not always precise in technical expression, was in reality quite exact in his own mind. He is consistent, for one thing, and such consistency demands systematic thought. Furthermore, his thought is not superficial, but does penetrate into the ultimate causes of things. Since, then, his thought is so systematic and so deep, it fulfills the definition of philosophy.

In the biography of Chesterton, Ward tells us how he wrote his St. Thomas Aquinas. He dictated about half the book without looking up any authorities, then told his secretary to get him some books on the subject, flipped through

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(72) Maisie WARD, The Return to Chesterton, p. xii.

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them, then dictated the rest of the book without again referring to any of the books. The Wards were concerned with what the results would be:

> Of the verdict of the greatest of them we were not long left in doubt. Etienne Gilson, who has given two of the most famous of philosophical lecture series - the Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen and the William James Lectures at Harvard - had begun his admiration for Chesterton with Greybeards at Play and had thought Orthodoxy "the best piece of apologetic the century had produced". When St. Thomas appeared he said to a friend of mine, "Chesterton makes one despair. I have been studying St. Thomas all my life and I could never have written such a book." After Gilbert's death, asked to give an appreciation, he returned to the same topic - "I consider it as being without possible comparison the best book ever written on St. Thomas. Nothing short of genius can account for such an achievement. Everybody will no doubt admit that it is a 'clever book', but the few readers who have spent twenty or thirty years in studying St. Thomas Aquinas, and who, perhaps, have themselves published two or three volumes on the subject, cannot fail to perceive that the so-called 'wit' of Chesterton has put their scholarship to shame. He has guessed all that which they had tried to demonstrate; and he has said all that which they were more or less clumsily attempting to express in academic formulas. Chesterton was one of the deepest thinkers who ever existed; he was deep because he was right; and he could not help being right; but he could not either help being modest and charitable, so he left it to those who could understand him to know that he was right, and deep; to the others, he apologized for being right, and he made up for being deep by being witty. That is all they can see of him."(73)

We are told in an Anthology introduction that:

"Chesterton's success was warmly proclaimed by leaders of

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(73) Maisie WARD, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, pp. 619-620.

the Thomist Revival in Europe like Etienne Gilson . . . and Father Gillet, Master-General of the Dominican Order."(74)

Father O'Connor tells us that: "He is quite soberly estimated by those who know best to be a portent of the Philosophia Perennis, since he discovered it himself and adorned it all his life, so that a Dominican professor said his works would do for footnotes to the Philosophy of St. Thomas."(75)

Christopher Hollis has this to say about his Thomism:

> The remarkable revival of Thomism in modern Europe has indeed been the begetter of specialized works of scholarship of the greatest value. Yet there is a great danger in leaving a revival solely to the specialists - a danger that we shall not be allowed to see the woods for the trees. It was proved that Chesterton's general commentary was exactly what the general reader needed. Thomist scholars were the first and most generous in their praise.(76)

Chesterton wrote no textbooks for a philosophy class. But it is true that: "He has written philosophy that is more fascinating than fiction, and fiction that is crammed with philosophy."(77)

One writer has summed up the place of Chesterton as a

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(74) D. B. Wyndham LEWIS, in his Introduction to G. K. Chesterton, An Anthology, p. xvi.

(75) John O'CONNOR, Father Brown on Chesterton, p. 157.

(76) Christopher HOLLIS, G. K. Chesterton, p. 20.

(77) Gerald BULLETT, The Innocence of G. K. Chesterton, p. 68.

philosopher very well:

> We think that Chesterton deserves a place in philosophy and in the neo-scholastic movement because of the Thomistic synthesis which, in principle, pervades his art. Chesterton is not a formal philosopher; hence we can only judge him on the formal philosophy which he presumed and which is the basis of his writings.(78)
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> . . . . . .
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> He worked out his own philosophy and found that it was Thomism - six centuries old.(79)

Besides giving this sort of testimony from admirers of Chesterton, we ought, perhaps, to sample the Chestertonian style of philosophical presentation. We think that a classical example of his ability to show the natural rational development of certain philosophical concepts is his section in St. Thomas Aquinas on being and becoming, potentiality and act:

> But when we come to look at the fact or facts . . . we observe that they have a rather queer character, which has made many moderns grow strangely and restlessly sceptical about them. For instance, they are largely in a state of change, from being one thing to being another; or their qualities are relative to other things; or they appear to move incessantly; or they appear to vanish entirely. At this point . . . many sages lose hold of the first principle of reality, which they would concede at first; and fall back on saying that there is nothing except change; or nothing except comparison; or nothing except flux; or in effect that there is nothing at all. Aquinas turns the whole argument the other way, keeping in line with his first realization of reality. There is

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(78) Joseph Wm. SPRUG, Basic Philosophical Principles in the Pre-Catholic Work of G. K. Chesterton and their Relation to Certain Modern Trends, p. 3.

(79) Ibid., p. 4.

> no doubt about the being of being, even if it does sometimes look like becoming; that is because what we see is not the fulness of being; or (to continue a sort of colloquial slang) we never see being being as much as it can. Ice is melted into cold water and cold water is heated into hot water; it cannot be all three at once. But this does not make water unreal or even relative; it only means that its being is limited to being one thing at a time. But the fulness of being is everything that it can be; and without it the lesser or approximate forms of being cannot be explained as anything; unless they are explained away as nothing.
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> . . . . . .
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> But this distinction in philosophy is tremendous as a turning-point in history. Most thinkers, on realizing the apparent mutability of being, have really forgotten their own realization of the being, and believed only in the mutability. They cannot even say that a thing changes into another thing; for them there is no instant in the process at which it is a thing at all. It is only a change . . . . St. Thomas maintains that the ordinary thing at any moment is something; but it is not everything that it could be. There is a fulness of being, in which it could be everything that it can be. Thus, while most sages come at last to nothing but naked change, he comes to the ultimate thing that is unchangeable, because it is all the other things at once. While they describe a change which is really a change in nothing, he describes a changelessness which includes the changes of everything. Things change because they are not complete; but their reality can only be explained as part of something that is complete. It is God.(80)

He then goes on to show the extensive bad results of this fundamental error:

> A hundred human philosophies, ranging over the earth from Nominalism to Nirvana and Maya, from formless Evolutionism to mindless Quietism, all come from this first break in the Thomist chain; the notion that because what we see does not satisfy us, or explain itself, it is not even what we see.

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(80) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. 200-202.

> That cosmos is a contradiction in terms and strangles itself but Thomism cuts itself free. The defect we see, in what is, is simply that it is not all that is. God is more actual even than Man; more actual even than Matter; for God with all His powers at every instant is immortally in action.(81)

For another fine example of Chestertonian philosophizing, we refer the reader to a splendid summing up of the early history of philosophy in the chapter entitled Demons and Philosophers in The Everlasting Man.(82)

CHESTERTON'S CONSISTENCY OF THOUGHT

We must say a word here about Chesterton's consistency of thought because we can thus demonstrate that it is not necessary in general to pay much attention to the time when his works were written when we try to manifest his thought on any particular subject. Students of Chesterton generally agree on this point. Maisie Ward says: "Chesterton himself changed less than almost anyone I have ever known or studied, and he would have claimed that the possession of fundamental principles made possible an unusually detached view of the changing scenes of human life and opinion."(83) The author of the preface to the End of the Roman Road says:

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(81) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. 200-202.

(82) Cf. IDEM, The Everlasting Man, pp. 142-144.

(83) Maisie WARD, The Return to Chesterton, p. 47.

"If Mr. Chesterton were writing this essay today . . . I do not believe he would have written it any differently . . . . "(84)

Another author, commenting on the book entitled Twelve Types, says of the author: "His philosophy has not changed during all his twenty-three years of public life . . . . the voice and tone of the twenty-five year old are the same as those of the mature writer that he has become."(85) De Fonseca says: "What he wrote yesterday might in substance have been written twenty odd years ago, and vice versa . . . . "(86)

Surprising as it may seem to many, even his conversion produced no profound change in the tone of his books. "While perusing Chesterton's books, before and after his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1922, the reader will find no fundamental difference between them."(87) Christopher Hollis also mentions this point: "His reception into the Catholic Church, although it was to him immensely the most important event of his private life, had little effect on his literary development."(88) "Therefore there was

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(84) A. St. John ADCOCK, in Preface to above, p. 10.

(85) Gerald BULLETT, The Innocence of G. K. Chesterton, p. 205.

(86) J. P. DE FONSEKA, in Preface to G. K. C. As M.C., p. xiii.

(87) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 35.

(88) Christopher HOLLIS, G. K. Chesterton, p. 20.

little, if anything, in such an earlier work as Orthodoxy, written many years before his reception into the Catholic Church, which he would not have been willing to repeat at the end of his life."(89)

Finally, we have the testimony of the man himself on behalf of his own consistency; and who should know better? He compiled a book of his prefaces to various works and says of the various chapters, which were written at different times in his life:

> On the whole . . . whenever I happen to come across one of these fortunately forgotten fragments from my stratified past, I may indeed shudder at their crudity of expression, but I am rather surprised to see how little my fundamental convictions have changed. For my final conviction, which was also a conversion, did not come to destroy but to fulfill.(90)

In the same vein, in his Autobiography, speaking of several pamphlets he wrote about Prussia, he says: "I am still perfectly prepared to support their truth. I hardly know of a word I would alter."(91)

He gives the reason for his consistency:

> I have always suffered from the disadvantage, among my solid and sturdy British countrymen, of not altering my opinions quickly enough. I have generally attempted, in a modest way, to have reasons for my opinions; and I have never been

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(89) Christopher HOLLIS, G. K. Chesterton, p. 20.

(90) G. K. CHESTERTON, G. K. C. As M. C., p. vii.

(91) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 255.

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> able to see why the opinions should change until the reasons change. If I were a really sturdy and stolid Briton, it would, of course, be enough for me that the fashions change. For that sort of sturdy Briton does not want to be consistent with himself; he only wants to be consistent with everybody else.(92)

Again we can apply to the man himself the words he wrote of another. He wrote of Dickens:

> Thomas Aquinas said there was no time in the sight of God; however this may be, there was no time in the sight of Dickens. As a general rule Dickens can be read in any order; not only in any order of books, but even in any order of chapters.(93)

CONCLUSIONS

Thus far we have given in the introduction the purpose of this thesis; and in the first chapter we have discussed: first, the life of Chesterton; secondly, his works; thirdly, his conversion; fourthly, his character; fifthly, his style; sixthly, some appreciations or evaluations of his place in history; seventhly, Chesterton as a philosopher; and lastly, his consistency of thought throughout life. For purposes of this thesis the two last mentioned points are of most importance. We have demonstrated that although Chesterton is not a formal text-book type of writer, he is still considered an eminent philosopher in the opinion of other

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(92) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, p. 251.

(93) IDEM, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 3.

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reputable philosophers. Besides, we have seen the agreement of students of his works about his consistency, which makes the work of research into his writings much simpler, for it obviates the necessity of paying strict attention to the dates of his various writings to observe changes of opinions on this or that point. His opinions changed to no significant degree.

We now proceed to the minute examination of Chesterton's concept of wonder.

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CHAPTER TWO

IS WONDER A VIRTUE?

Strange as it seems, we live in a world of scientific research producing discoveries and innovations designed for greater and greater material progress, and for more comfortable living; yet the net result seems to be a growing scepticism and cynicism, boredom and pessimism rather than the glorious "joie de vivre" that one would naturally expect to arise from such advances.

The most important contribution of Gilbert Keith Chesterton in philosophy lies in the field of moral philosophy, in his answer to this "taedium vitae". The answer is the spirit of wonder.

Chesterton, as we have already pointed out, is not formal in his presentation of philosophical thought, even when he directly treats of the Thomistic system of philosophy. He always attempts to present the matter in such a way that the modern who is unacquainted with Thomistic terminology may be able to understand what he is saying.

Likewise we find that in his presentation of "wonder" and its consequences he is never formal in his presentation. He never wrote a book on this particular subject in the formal philosophical manner - as we might expect when we read of the importance he attaches to the subject. Yet the con-

cept permeates all his works to the extent that we feel secure in calling it his greatest philosophical contribution.

There is no doubt that the topic of wonder is deserving of special philosophical consideration. The fundamental question that arises in a study of Chesterton is whether in any true philosophical sense wonder can be considered a virtue. There are many more things which could be discussed about wonder, just as St. Thomas in the Summa has a number of articles about each virtue or passion. The most fundamental question, however, is the one mentioned above; and for the purposes we have in mind it will be sufficient to present the case for and against this primary proposition.

Let us begin with the etymological derivation of the word as presented by Regis:

> Derived from auditory experience, from the frightening noise we call thunder (F. tonnerre), the French word for wonder (étonnement) is an exact translation of the Latin admiratio and the Greek thaumadzein, and it has kept their general meaning of psychological tension in the face of the extraordinary, the prodigious, the unusual. It expresses an emotive reaction consequent upon an unusual or unaccustomed object of knowledge.(1)

St. Thomas calls wonder "a kind of desire for knowledge; a desire which comes to a man when he sees an effect of which the cause either is unknown to him, or surpasses his

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(1) L. M. REGIS, O. P., Epistomology, translated by Imelda C. Byrne, N. Y., Macmillan, 1959, p. 13.

knowledge or faculty of understanding."(2) In another place St. Thomas says: "Admiration is a kind of fear resulting from the apprehension of a thing that surpasses our faculties . . . . "(3)

Regis says that this fear is a fear of ignorance;(4) and this seems to be confirmed by Aristotle.(5)

In Chesterton's works we find various references to the word with no formal definition contemplated by the author, but with sufficient information to give us a rather precise idea of what he meant.

In his book on Cobbett he speaks of a quality that Cobbett possessed: " . . . this unearthly detachment, this dry light of reality, this vision of a man from the moon."(6) In The Coloured Lands he writes of it as follows:

> When I was young I wrote a lot of little poems, mostly about the beauty and necessity of Wonder; which was a genuine feeling with me, as it is still. The power of seeing plain things and landscapes in

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(2) ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, I-II, q. 32, a. 8c. "Est autem admiratio desiderium quoddam sciendi; quod in homine contingit ex hoc quod videt effectum, et ignorat causam, vel ex hoc quod causa talis effectus excedit cognitionem aut facultatem ipsius."

(3) S. T., II-II, q. 180, a. 3, ad 3. " . . . admiratio est species timoris consequens apprehensionem alicujus rei excedentis nostram facultatem . . . . "

(4) L. M. REGIS, O. P., Epistomology, p. 15.

(5) Cf. ARISTOTLE, Metaphysics, I, 2.

(6) G. K. CHESTERTON, William Cobbett, p. 161.

> a kind of sunlight of surprise; the power of jumping at the sight of a bird as if at a winged bullet; the power of being brought to a standstill by a tree as by the gesture of a gigantic hand; in short, the power of poetically running one's head against a post is one which varies in different people and which I can say without conceit is a part of my own human nature. It is not a power that indicates any artistic strength, still less any spiritual exaltation; men who are religious in a sense too sublime for me to conceive are equally without it. Of the pebble in the pathways, of the twig on the hedge, it may truly be said that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see these things and have not seen them. It is a small and special gift, but an innocent one.(7)

He writes about Cardinal Newman achieving "that awful and beautiful thing which is the dream of all democracy, the seeing of all things as wonderful ... . . "(8) In another book he calls it "this light of the higher ignorance . . . . "(9) In a book on art he calls it "that sense of morning and youth . . . . " This, he maintains, is "the soul of all the arts . . . . "(10) He defines it as "a mystical but almost necessary mood of astonishment at everything outside one's own soul - even one's own body. It may even involve a wild vision in which one's own boots on one's own feet seem to be things distant and unfamiliar."(11) It

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(7) G. K. CHESTERTON, Coloured Lands, pp. 157-158.

(8) IDEM, A Handful of Authors, p. 131.

(9) IDEM, Irish Impressions, p. 24.

(10) IDEM, intr. in Giotto, the Legend of St. Francis, p. 12.

(11) IDEM, Fancies Versus Fads, p. 240.

means that you "look at ordinary things and think how extra-ordinary they are."(12) It is "to see a thing as if he had never seen it before."(13) He seems to be speaking of the same thing when he talks about "that imaginative intensity of appreciation which does not permit anything that might be vivid or significant to become trivial or vulgar."(14)

Commentators on the works of Chesterton have some informative references to the topic of "wonder". De Fonseca refers to it as a virtue. He says that this is the "virtue defined philosophically": " . . . a need for seeing the old thing as a new thing . . . . "(15) Lea speaks of "this attitude of more than intellectual humility, which he equated with the spontaneous 'wonder' of children - the vision uncorrupted by theory or convention . . . . "(16) The same author speaks of a possible "comparison between Chesterton's 'wonder' and the 'awe before the pure phenomenon' of the spinozist, Goethe . . . . "(17) He writes in another place

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(12) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Poet and the Lunatics, p. 106.

(13) Ibid., p. 42.

(14) G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, p. 184.

(15) J. P. DE FONSECA, Preface to G. K. C. As M.C., p. x.

(16) F. A. LEA, The Wild Knight of Battersea, p. 14.

(17) Ibid., pp. 23-24.

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of "the equation of wonder with humour".(18) This is an obvious oversimplification. Cammaerts calls wonder "admiration and appetite for the world."(19) The ability to practice this virtue is "to recognize the everyday magic of this world and of the human soul . . . . "(20) It means the possession of "the sense of more familiar and simpler marvels."(21) It is "at the base of all true religion."(22) Bullett says: "It is the spirit that sees life, and tries to see philosophy, under concrete symbols, a contest between definite colours . . . . "(23) It is "an exulting in monotony"(24) or "a sense of living in the beginning of creation . . . . "(25) Whitehorn speaks of Chesterton's "ability to look at anything as if he saw it for the first time . . . . "(26) He saw the world through the eyes of a child. In a context quite unfavorable to this particular virtue of Chesterton, West still writes accurately when he

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(18) F. A. LEA, The Wild Knight of Battersea, p. 25.

(19) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 52.

(20) Ibid.

(21) Ibid.

(22) Ibid., p. 46.

(23) Gerald BULLETT, The Innocence of G. K. Chesterton, p. 212.

(24) Ibid., p. 47.

(25) Ibid., p. 211.

(26) K. E. WHITEHORN, Introduction to Chesterton Essays, p.x.

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says: "Chesterton cultivated this attitude of always expecting to be surprised by the most natural things in the world . . . . "(27) Pfleger describes this attitude of Chesterton as "experiencing the world with the intensity and novelty peculiar to the great poet."(28) Sister Marie Virginia characterizes it as "seeing ordinary things in an extraordinary way."(29)

The question is whether we can correctly call this "dry light of reality", this "power", this "seeing", this "sense", this "mood", this "vision", this "appreciation", this "need", this "attitude", this "appetite", this "spirit", this "ability" - can we correctly call this a virtue?

For the sake of simplifying the presentation of both sides of the question, let us put the whole question in the form of a "Summa" article.

Whether Wonder in Any Sense Is Properly Called a Virtue.

Objection 1: Wonder is not a virtue because it seems to denote only a passive state.

Objection 2: Wonder is not a virtue because it is an emotion or passion.

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(27) Julius WEST, G. K. Chesterton, A Critical Study, p. 117.

(28) Karl PFLEGER, Wrestlers With Christ, p. 164.

(29) Sister MARIE VIRGINIA, G. K. Chesterton's Evangel, p. 4.

Objection 3: Wonder is not a special virtue in its own right because it is the same as studiousness.

On the contrary, De Fonseca refers to it as a virtue. He says that this is the "virtue defined philosophically": " . . . a need for seeing the old thing as a new thing."(30)

I answer that:

We must distinguish between wonder at extraordinary things and wonder at ordinary things. As is easily seen by turning back to the definitions or descriptions of wonder as understood by Chesterton and his commentators, the wonder about which Chesterton is speaking is wonder at ordinary things. It is in this sense that it seems wonder may properly be called a virtue.

I. St. Thomas has an article entitled "Whether Penance is a Virtue?" In this article his argument is perfectly applicable to our problem on wonder:

> . . . sorrow or sadness is twofold. First, it denotes a passion of the sensitive appetite, and in this sense penance is not a virtue, but a passion. Secondly, it denotes an act of the will, and in this way it implies choice, and if this be right, it must, of necessity, be an act of virtue.(31)

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(30) Cf. footnote no. 15 above.

(31) ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, III, q. 85, a. 1. " . . . dolor vel tristitia dupliciter dicitur: uno modo secundum quod est passio quaedam appetitus sensitivi, et quantum ad hoc poenitentia non est virtus, sed passio; alio modo secundum quod consistit in voluntate, et hoc modo est sum quadam electione: quae quidem, si sit recta, necesse est quod sit actus virtutis."

All we have to do is to substitute the word "wonder" for the word "penance" above. Wonder denotes an act of the will and implies choice if we mean wonder at ordinary things. Wonder involves choice because it means surrender to the modern spirit of boredom and surfeit or choosing to take up weapons against these enemies of humanity. The right choice is an act of virtue. To make this choice habitually is to possess the virtue of wonder.

II. Another reason why it seems that this kind of wonder may properly be called a virtue is because "where there is a special kind of difficulty . . . there is a special virtue."(32) It is true that there is no difficulty for the child to experience wonder even at ordinary things, but there is difficulty for the adult, and the virtue of which Chesterton is speaking is an adult virtue. It means persistence in the childlike spirit unto the formation of the mature character. Chesterton says it is "something that is present in childhood and which can still preserve and invigorate manhood."(33) We notice the words "is" and "can". There is, therefore, a difficulty here:

> I had not lost, and I have never lost, the conviction that such primal things are mysterious and amazing;

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(32) S. T., II-II, q. 137, a. 1, c. " . . . ubi occurrit specialis ratio difficultatis . . . ibi est specialis virtus."

(33) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common Man, p. 252.

> but if they were amazing, why did anybody have to remind us that they were amazing? Why was there, as I had already realized that there certainly was, a sort of daily fight to appreciate the daylight; to which we had to summon all imagination and poetry and the labour of the arts to aid us?(34)

There is a special kind of difficulty because it means fighting the whole spirit of the age.

> Most people cannot believe their eyes; it is the very last thing in which they can believe. They can believe in the wildest creeds and the crudest philosophies; similarly they can believe in a past . . . . But they cannot believe in the present; in the thing present to their sight; in the thing in whose real presence they stand.(35)

In another place he says:

> Every human being has forgotten who he is and where he came from. We are all blasted with one great obliteration of memory . . . . We have forgotten our own meaning, and we are all wandering about the streets without keepers. All that we call common sense and practicality and wordly wisdom only means that we forget that we have forgotten.(36)

And, as if continuing the same thought, in two other works:

> For obvious things are very easily forgotten; and indeed every high civilization decays by forgetting obvious things.(37) We all go on every day, unless we are continually goading ourselves . . . seeing less and less of the significance of the sky or the stones.(38)

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(34) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common Man, p. 243.

(35) IDEM, William Cobbett, p. 161.

(36) IDEM, Lunacy and Letters, p. 103.

(37) IDEM, The New Jerusalem, p. 26.

(38) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, p. 85.

Modern inventions, too, become so commonplace that they fail to excite the proper reaction: "I am not objecting to the statement that the science of the modern world is wonderful; I am only objecting to the modern world because it does not wonder at it."(39)

> In short, my doubts about the modern materialistic machinery are doubts about its ultimate utility in practice. But I never questioned its poetry, its fantasy, the fitness of so sublime a conjuring trick for a children's party. What I complain of is that the modern children have forgotten how to shriek.(40)

So we gather from the above quotations how widespread Chesterton thought the evil to be, and with what great difficulty we find our way to wonder. With St. Thomas, then, we may say that where there is such special difficulty, there is a special virtue.

Reply Obj. 1: Wonder is active in the sense in which we use the word here; for we are speaking of willed acts of wonder (or consequent wonder).

Reply Obj. 2: The response is evident from corpus, part I.

Reply Obj. 3: Wonder seems to be a part of the virtue of studiousness ("studiositas") which itself is a potential part of the cardinal virtue of temperance.(41)

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(39) G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, p. 185.

(40) Ibid., p. 186.

(41) ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, II-II, q. 166 and q. 167.

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Wonder, then, is an analogous term, which seems to have some claim to definition as a special virtue. At any rate, we shall use the term virtue in reference to wonder in the absence of any better term to use.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE PARTS OF WONDER

St. Thomas tells us what he means by the parts of a virtue:

> Parts are of three kinds, namely, integral, as wall, roof, and foundations are parts of a house; subjective, as ox and lion are parts of animal; and potential, as the nutritive and sensitive powers are parts of the soul. Accordingly, parts can be assigned to a virtue in three ways. First, in likeness to integral parts, so that the things which need to concur for the perfect act of a virtue, are called the parts of that virtue . . . . The subjective parts of a virtue are its various species . . . . The potential parts of a virtue are the virtues connected with it, which are directed to certain secondary acts or matters, not having, as it were, the whole power of the principle virtue.(1)

We want to know what the parts of the virtue of wonder would be. In reading the works of Chesterton, we will, of course, find no special mention or formal presentation of

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(1) ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, II-II, q. 48, a. 1, c. " . . . triplex est pars: scilicet integralis, ut paries, tectum, et fundamentum sunt partes domus; subjectiva, sicut bos et leo sunt partes animalis; et potentialis, sicut nutritivum et sensitivum sunt partes animae. Tribus ergo modis possunt assignari partes alicui virtuti. Uno modo ad similitudinem partium integralium: ut scilicet illa dicantur esse partes virtutis alicujus quae necesse est concurrere ad perfectum actum virtutis illius . . . . Partes autem subjectivae virtutis dicuntur species ejus diversae . . . . Partes autem potentiales alicujus virtutis dicuntur virtutes adjunctae, quae ordinantur ad aliquos secundarios actus, vel materias, quasi non habentes totam potentiam principalis virtutis."

any of the parts of the virtue; but we do find that here and there there are various references to what we consider component parts. The only ones we shall find, however, would correspond to what St. Thomas called the integral parts. There are no evident potential parts to the virtue of wonder. Regarding the subjective parts, we may conclude from what has been said about the definitions of the virtue by St. Thomas and by Chesterton, that there are two such subjective parts.

The two subjective parts would seem to be the wonder at extraordinary things which would be assumed in St. Thomas' discussion of wonder; and the wonder at ordinary things which are the special object of the virtue as Chesterton would have it.

St. Thomas speaks of wonder where he speaks of miracles - an extraordinary element:

> Wherefore a thing is wonderful to one man, and not at all to others; as an eclipse is to a rustic, but not to an astronomer. Now a miracle is so called as being full of wonder; as having a cause absolutely hidden from all: and this cause is God.(2)

From Chesterton's definitions of wonder we know he is speaking of wonder at ordinary things.(3) There are, therefore,

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(2) ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, I, q. 105, a. 7, c. "Unde aliquid est mirum uni quod non est mirum alii; sicut eclipsim solis miratur rusticus, non autem astrologus. Miraculum autem dicitur quasi admiratione plenum, quod scilicet habet causam simpliciter et omnibus occultam. Haec autem est Deus."

(3) See chapter II, note no. 12.

these two subjective parts of the virtue of wonder.

We now probe into the integral parts of the virtue, trying to gather various factors from a careful reading of Chesterton in disassociated passages throughout his many works. We imitate St. Thomas in his concoction of the recipe for the virtue of prudence. In that part of the Summa St. Thomas tells us that prudence is made up of memory, understanding, docility, personal sagacity, reasoning, foresight, circumspection, and caution.(4) Chesterton's allusions to matters connected with the virtue of wonder lead us to the conclusion that there are especially six elements that enter into the make-up of the virtue: observation, enthusiasm, the love of things, religious awe, humility, and childlikeness. These we shall discuss one by one.

I. OBSERVATION

To practice the virtue of wonder it is necessary to be observant, and to be at least a moderate extrovert.

Chesterton wrote: "The things that men see every day are the things they never see at all."(5) "It is a thousand to one that the reader is looking at something that he has never seen: that is, never realized."(6)

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(4) Cf. S. T., II-II, q. 49.

(5) G. K. CHESTERTON, Lunacy and Letters, p. 68.

(6) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, p. v.

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> None of us think enough of these things on which the eye rests. But don't let us let the eye rest. Why should the eye be so lazy? Let us exercise the eye until it learns to see the startling facts that run across the landscape as plain as a painted fence. Let us be ocular athletes.(7)

Chesterton goes so far as to say that this particular part of the virtue of wonder is the very purpose of all his teaching effort: "The object of my school is to show how many extraordinary things even a lazy and ordinary man may see if he can spur himself to the single activity of seeing."(8)

In favor of extraverts Chesterton has one of his women characters in the novel Manalive speak as follows:

> "I mean," said Mary, "they are the kind that look outwards and get interested in the world. It doesn't matter a bit whether it's arguing, or bicycling, or breaking down the ends of the earth . . . . Stick to the man who looks out of the window and tries to understand the world."(9)

No man should, in the opinion of Chesterton, be proud of being unobservant:

> The type of man does exist who says clearly and deliberately that he does not want to observe the little laws that surround him, that he is proud of being absent-minded, that he is proud of his disdain of detail. Whenever this occurs it certainly arises in another and most literal sense from absence - of Mind.(10)

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(7) G. K. CHESTERTON, Tremendous Trifles, p. vi.

(8) Ibid., p. 6.

(9) IDEM, Manalive, pp. 380-381.

(10) IDEM, A Handful of Authors, p. 173.

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In one of his plays Chesterton has Samuel Johnson say:

"Reason will tell anyone but a fool to attend to little things. The bullet that kills a man is a little thing. The pill that saves his life is a little thing. It is by his consciousness of little things that a man proves himself to be properly alive. He who is proud of being unaware of his surroundings, be he sage of the east or of the west, is proud of being a stock or a stone. A turnip is unconscious of its surroundings."(11)

The paragon of extroverts, according to Chesterton, was William Cobbett:

He had a native power or piece of good fortune which education . . . sometimes destroys. In one thing he was a very lucky and lonely mortal.

He could see before he could read. Most modern people can read before they can see. They have read about a hundred things long before they have seen one of them. Most town children have read about corn or cattle as if they were dwarfs or dragons, long before they have seen a grain of wheat or a cow. Many of them have read about ships or churches, or the marching of soldiers or the crowd cheering a king, or any other normal sight, which they have never seen. By a weird mesmerism which it is not here necessary to analyze, what people read has a sort of magic power over their sight. It lays a spell on their eyes, so that they see what they expect to see. They do not see the most solid and striking things that contradict what they expect to see. They believe their schoolmasters too well to believe their eyes. They trust the map against the mountain. Cobbett was a man without these magic spectacles. He did not see what he expected to see, but what he saw. He liked books; but he could not only read between the lines but through the book.(12)

These should be sufficient in number as examples of Chesterton's insistence on observation as an integral part

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(11) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Judgment of Dr. Johnson, pp. 56-57.

(12) IDEM, William Cobbett, pp. 148-149.

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of the virtue of wonder. The very first thing we must learn to practice this virtue is to use well our powers of observation. We must really see things, not merely look without seeing.

II. ENTHUSIASM

The second element that enters into the formula for the practice of wonder is the ingredient of enthusiasm. We have just finished speaking of the need of observation. This observation, however, must be carried on in a certain special spirit, a spirit of "freshness", a spirit of "surprise", a spirit that runs contrary to ennui and boredom. This enthusiasm is "a certain vivacity, which to some seems vitality and to some vulgarity . . . . "(13) Chesterton defends it and says that it

> is not only an ambition but an ideal. It must always be grasped that this vulgarity is an ideal even more than it is a reality. It is an ideal when it is not a reality.(14)

The context in which the above references to enthusiasm are contained is a section of his book on America wherein he is making an appraisal of the American spirit and praising this particular factor of the American disposition.

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(13) G. K. CHESTERTON, What I Saw In America, p. 61.

(14) Ibid.

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Chesterton gives us an idea of what he means by this freshness when he speaks of one of the characters in French literature who

> discovers with delight that he has been talking prose all his life . . . . He has the freshness to enjoy a fresh fact, the freshness to enjoy an old one. He can feel that the common thing prose is an accomplishment like verse . . . it is the miracle of language. He can feel the subtle taste of water, and roll it on his tongue like wine.(15)

The integral part of wonder of which we are now speaking is sometimes given the name of "gusto" by Chesterton: "All real good taste is gusto - the power of appreciating the presence - or the absence - of a particular and positive pleasure."(16)

He insists on this gusto or enthusiasm as essential to the real happiness of man:

> For there is only one happiness possible or conceivable under the sun, and that is enthusiasm - that strange and splendid word that has passed through so many vicissitudes, which meant, in the eighteenth century, the condition of a lunatic, and in ancient Greece the presence of a god.(17)

Because of this connection between enthusiasm and happiness, Chesterton warns against its loss:

> Human beings are happy so long as they retain the receptive power and the power of reaction in surprise and gratitude to something outside . . . . The moment the self within is consciously felt as some-

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(15) G. K. CHESTERTON, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, p. 70

(16) IDEM, The Victorian Age in Literature, pp. 85-86.

(17) G. K. CHESTERTON, C. H. PERRIS, Leo Tolstoy, pp 2-3.

> thing superior to any of the gifts that can be brought to it, or any of the adventures that it may enjoy, there has appeared a sort of self-devouring fastidiousness and a disenchantment in advance, which fulfills all the Tartarean emblems of thirst and of despair.(18)

Chesterton further insists that men want this factor in their lives more than the things we customarily suppose to be the objects of their predilection. He expresses this thought in one of his plays: "They want surprise. They do not want sufficiency or security. They want surprise. They do not want regular wages. They want irregular wealth."(19)

One who is acquainted with Chesterton's social views may be rather taken aback by the above quotation; but an explanation is forthcoming by the writer of the preface, where she elucidates his viewpoint:

> There is indeed nothing in the doctrine of "surprise" that is necessarily critical of social security as such; what is criticized is the attitude of mind which takes security, happiness, or life itself to be no more than what our own merit entitles us to.(20)

Cammaerts has this comment on Chesterton's stress on the element of surprise:

> He always insisted on the strangeness of the world; indeed it was this feeling of strangeness, of surprise which, according to him, allowed us to understand the purpose of a mysterious Creator behind the Creation.

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(18) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common Man, pp. 252-253.

(19) IDEM, The Surprise, p. 25.

(20) Dorothy L. SAYERS, in Preface to The Surprise, pp. 7-8.

> Man himself was the queerest of all beasts, so queer that he could not possibly be nothing but a beast.(21)

Chesterton offers as examples of this particular quality of soul the poets Chaucer and Robert Browning, Americans in general, and Chesterton himself. Amateurs are the example of an enthusiastic class.

Chesterton says that an Englishman possesses this quality of enthusiasm only occasionally, when the mood strikes, but with the American "such excitement is not a mood but a moral ideal."(22) This excitement is about things which are insignificant in themselves. He explains, however, that:

> It is not that they do not know that the object is small in itself; it is that they do really believe that the enthusiasm is great in itself. They admire people for being impressionable. They admire people being excited. An American so struggling for some disproportionate trifle . . . really feels in a mystical way that he is right, because it is his whole morality to be keen. So long as he wants something very much, whatever it is, he feels he has his conscience behind him, and the common sentiment of society behind him, and God and the whole universe behind him.(23)

Not only is this enthusiasm right to the American; it is a part of his picture of the ideal man:

> To him the enthusiasm itself is meritorious. To him the excitement itself is dignified. He counts it a

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(21) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 59.

(22) G. K. CHESTERTON, What I Saw in America, p. 276.

(23) Ibid., p. 274.

> part of his manhood to fast or fight or rise from a bed of sickness for something, or possibly for anything. His ideal is not to be a lock that only a worthy key can open, but a "live wire" that anything can touch or anybody can use. In a word, there is a difference in the very definition of virility and therefore of virtue. A live wire is not only active, it is also sensitive. Thus sensibility becomes actually a part of virility.(24)

Long before he went to America Chesterton discussed this same sensibility: "A great man is not a man so strong that he feels less than other men; he is man so strong that he feels more." He condemns Nietszche's doctrine of hardness and says it is equivalent to telling a man to be dead in heart. "Sensibility is the definition of life."(25)

This sensibilitymanifested by enthusiasm is a trait of Americans which to Chesterton saves them from his condemnation, for this "virtue of excitability . . . redeems with romance their clockwork cosmos and its industrial ideals."(26)

The second example we have of this second element in the virtue of wonder is the poet Chaucer, in whose works Chesterton finds this characteristic very prominent:

> It is gusto; it is zest; it is a certain appetite for things as they really are, and because they actually are; for a stone because it is a stone, or a story because it is a story. If that is merely simplicity, he was simple. If that is merely

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(24) G. K. CHESTERTON, What I Saw in America, p. 272.

(25) IDEM, Heretics, p. 89.

(26) IDEM, What I Saw in America, p. 277.

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> stupidity, he was stupid. That is, if we would appreciate him or his age, we must go back to something that stirred in us when we first found that the door of a doll's-house would open; or when we first found that the end of a story could be the point of the story, as in the surprise that ends the admirable story of Puss in Boots.(27)

The type of person who would generally personify the spirit of enthusiasm was, according to Chesterton, the amateur. Robert Browning was one of those with the amateur spirit, and therefore also a possessor of the attribute of enthusiasm:

> He was, in other words, what is called an amateur. The word amateur has come by the thousand oddities of language to convey an idea of tepidity; whereas the word itself has the meaning of passion. Nor is this peculiarity confined to the mere form of the word; the actual characteristic of these nameless dilettanti is a genuine fire and reality. A man must love a thing very much if he . . . practices it without any hope of doing it well. Such a man must love the toils of the work more than any other man can love the rewards of it.(28)

The final example of enthusiasm is Chesterton himself. In his Autobiography he writes: "A man does not grow old without being bothered; but I have grown old without being bored. Existence is still a strange thing to me; and as a stranger I give it welcome."(29)

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(27) G. K. CHESTERTON, Chaucer, pp. 156-157.

(28) IDEM, Robert Browning, p. 84.

(29) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 353.

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In another book he further expounds his tendencies:

> I happen to be a person who has no tendency at all to tedium; I can truly say that I have hardly ever been bored in my life. I have often amused myself by thinking how amusing it might be in a howling wilderness or on a desert island. The only glimpse I ever got in my life of the hell of unbearable monotony, of something I felt I would rather die than endure, was in some of those films describing the fast and fashionable life of New York. Then for one instant I understood what is meant by the agony of being satisfied, or as we used to say, sated.(30)

The boredom from which Chesterton claims he was exempt is a thing that he blames not on external causes, but on the individual himself:

> There is no such thing on earth as an uninteresting subject; the only thing that can exist is an uninterested person. Nothing is more keenly required than a defence of bores . . . . The bore, by his starry enthusiasm, his solemn happiness, may, in some sense, have proved himself poetical. The bored has certainly proved himself prosaic.(31)

Although it obviously needs a special exegesis, the following hyperbole from one of Chesterton's fictional characters advises us in the fight on boredom:

> "All habits are bad habits," said Michael, with deadly calm. "Madness does not come by breaking out, but by giving in; by settling down in some dirty, little, self-repeating circle of ideas; by being tamed. You went mad about money, because you're an heiress.(32)

Chesterton's feelings about this spirit of surprise,

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(30) G. K. CHESTERTON, Sidelights on New London and Newer York, pp. 58-59.

(31) IDEM, Heretics, p. 38

(32) IDEM, Manalive, p. 84.

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gusto, or enthusiasm are summed up in these words:

> I believe about the universal cosmos, or for that matter about every weed or pebble in the cosmos; that men will never rightly realize that it is beautiful, until they realize that it is strange.(33)

And in a poem he expresses one of the points we have already stressed: that although this wonder is quite natural to man at first, it is lost with age and requires a continuous struggle to keep it aglow as a virtue of the mature man:

> When all my days are ending
> And I have no song to sing,
> I think I shall not be too old
> To stare at everything;
> As I stared at a nursery door
> Or a tall tree and a swing.
> . . . . . .
> And things grow new though I grow old,
> Though I grow old and die.(34)

We cannot complete this section on the spirit of surprise or enthusiasm without quoting from a poem which bears the very name of surprise in its title:

> Sunder me from my bones, O sword of God,
> Till they stand stark and strange as do the trees;
> That I whose heart goes up with the soaring woods
> May marvel as much at these.
> . . . . . .
> Give me miraculous eyes to see my eye,
> Those rolling mirrors made alive in me,
> Terrible crystal more incredible
> Than all the things they see.

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(33) G. K. CHESTERTON, Christendom in Dublin, p. 33.

(34) IDEM, A Second Childhood in The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, pp. 76-77.

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> Sunder me from my soul, that I may see
> The sins like streaming wounds, the life's brave beat;
> Till I shall save myself, as I would save
> A stranger in the street.(35)

III. LOVE OF THINGS

Now we come to the third element to be added to the Chestertonian prescription for wonder. This we shall call the love of things.

Two of Chesterton's commentators mention this particular phase of Gilbert's attitude.

Cammaerts attempts to describe Chesterton's viewpoint thus: "Unless you admire the world you cannot conceive its Creator . . . . "(36) Again he says:

> The danger of science today, or rather of its application, is not so much that it attempts to supersede philosophy or religion in a vain attempt to direct man's destiny and the future of civilization, it is that it may dry up the very sources of this philosophy and religion by blunting the edge of man's admiration and appetite for the world.(37)

Pfleger writes: "To arouse delight in the world and man and love for them is a fine programme. But it needs the right man. Chesterton by his mere presence raises the temperature of life."(38)

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(35) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Sword of Surprise in The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, p. 61.

(36) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 46.

(37) Ibid., pp. 51-52.

(38) Karl PFLEGER, Wrestlers With Christ, p. 164.

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An example of how Chesterton expresses this idea of the love of things is found in one of his novels, Manalive. The principle character in the book is "teaching" a pessimistic professor how to appreciate life and everything in it: "'You shall thank heaven for churches and chapels and villas and vulgar people and puddles and pots and pans and sticks and rags and bones and spotted blinds.'"(39) He has just threatened the professor with death and makes him realize that at the moment he was threatened the professor began to appreciate what could be taken away from him:

> "The thing I saw shining in your eyes when you dangled on that bridge was enjoyment of life and not 'the Will to Live'. What you knew . . . was that the world, when all is said and done, is a wonderful and beautiful place; I know it, because I knew it at the same minute. I saw the gray clouds turn pink, and the little gilt clock in the crack between the houses. It was those things you hated leaving, not Life, whatever that is"(40)

In the same novel the man who is explaining the actions of Innocent Smith, the main character, ends his explanation of this episode of the pessimistic professor with the words:

> "For the goodness of good things, like the badness of bad things, is a prodigy past speech; it is to be pictured rather than spoken. We shall have gone deeper than the deeps of heaven and grown older than the oldest angels before we feel, even in its first faint vibrations, the everlasting violence of that double passion with which God both hates and loves the world."(41)

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(39) G. K. CHESTERTON, Manalive, p. 220.

(40) Ibid., pp. 223-224.

(41) Ibid., pp. 287-288.

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Of this "double passion" we have a word or two to say below.

One of Chesterton's most notable epigrams was written about "Innocent Smith": "'He has broken the conventions, but he has kept the commandments.'"(42) We must read the novel to know precisely how he accomplishes this. "'It is just because he does not want to steal, because he does not covet his neighbor's goods that he has captured the trick (oh, how we all long for it!) the trick of coveting his own goods.'"(43)

Another example of the Chestertonian advocacy of the love of things in creation is found in one of his poems entitled Femina Contra Mundum, wherein God is represented as saying:

> "Thou hast begun to love one of my works/Almost enough."(44)

A final example is found in a quotation from his "notebook" contained in Ward's book:

> "A grievance", he heads this thought:
> "Give me a little time,
> I shall not be able to appreciate them all;
> If you open so many doors
> And give me so many presents, O Lord God."
> He is almost overwhelmed with all that he has and with all that is, but accepts it ardently in its completeness.

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(42) G. K. CHESTERTON, Manalive, p. 371.

(43) Ibid., p. 372.

(44) IDEM, Femina Contra Mundum in The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, p. 338.

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"If the arms of a man could be a fiery circle
embracing the round world,
I think I should be that man."(45)

This love of things may sound like a "propositio piarum aurium offensiva". How can we call the love of things a part of a virtue, when detachment from creatures has been advocated by all the ascetical writers of the centuries for those who would advance in the way of perfection? What about this "double passion" of which Chesterton's fictional character speaks?

St. Thomas has the answer, telling us how we may love the things of this world:

> Nevertheless we can love irrational creatures out of charity, if we regard them as the good things that we desire for others, to wit, as we wish for their preservation, to God's honor and man's use; thus too does God love them out of charity.(46)

In the first book of the Holy Bible we read: "God saw that all he had made was very good."(47) We are to imitate God. If things are good, our will must go out to them; we must love them in the sense in which St. Thomas justifies this love.

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(45) Maisie WARD, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, pp. 59-60.

(46) S. T., II-II, q. 25, a. 3, c. "Possunt tamen ex charitate diligi creaturae irrationales, sicut bona quae aliis volumus, inquantum scilicet ex charitate volumus eas conservari ad honorem Dei, et utilitatem hominum: et sic etiam ex charitate Deus eas diligit."

(47) Genesis 1:30.

For you love all things that are
and loathe nothing that you have made;
for what you hated, you would not have fashioned.
And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it;
or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you?
But you spare all things, because they are yours,
O Lord and lover of souls,
for your imperishable spirit is in all things!(48)

IV. THE SPIRIT OF RELIGIOUS AWE

The fourth element in the prescription for wonder is the spirit of religious awe. We find proof that Chesterton considered this an essential part of the virtue in one of his earliest books, Heretics. One of the "heretics" he is discussing is Mr. George Bernard Shaw:

> That Mr. Shaw keeps a lifted head and a contemptuous face before the colossal panorama of empires and civilizations, this does not in itself convince one that he sees things as they are. I should be most effectively convinced that he did if I found him staring with religious astonishment at his own two feet. "What are those two beautiful and industrious beings," I can imagine him murmuring to himself, "whom I see everywhere, serving me I know not why? What fairy godmother bade them come trotting out of elfland when I was born? What god of the borderland, what barbaric god of legs, must I propitiate with fire and wine, lest they run away with me?"(49)

In like vein he further writes:

> The truth is, "Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall be gloriously surprised." The man who expects nothing, sees redder roses than common men can see, and greener grass, and a more startling sun . . . . Until we realize that things might not be, we cannot realize that things are . . . . Until

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(48) Wisdom 11, 24-26.

(49) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, pp. 64-65.

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> we picture nonentity we underrate the victory of God, and can realize none of the trophies of His ancient war. It is one of the million wild jests of truth that we know nothing until we know nothing.(50)

This same idea is carried out - the awe arising from a realization of the contingency of creatures in the world about us - in one of Chesterton's post-conversion books, in which, too, this religious awe is introduced as a complement to the preceding element of wonder that we have called the love of things:

> When we say that a poet praises the whole creation, we commonly mean only that he praises the whole cosmos. But this sort of poet does really praise creation, in the sense of the act of creation. He praises the passage or transition from nonentity to entity; there falls here also the shadow of that archtypal image of the bridge, which has given to the priest his archaic and mysterious name. The mystic who passes through the moment when there is nothing but God does in some sense behold the beginningless beginnings in which there was really nothing else. He not only appreciated everything but the nothing of which everything was made. In a fashion he endures and answers even the earthquake irony of the Book of Job; in some sense he is there when the foundations of the world are laid, with the morning stars singing together and the sons of God shouting for joy. That is but a distant adumbration of the reason why the Franciscan, ragged, penniless, homeless and apparently hopeless, did indeed come forth singing such songs as might come from the stars of morning; and shouting, a son of God.(51)

The whole idea is summed up in the words:

> He who has seen the whole world hanging on a hair of the mercy of God has seen the truth; we might

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(50) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 65.

(51) IDEM, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 77.

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almost say the cold truth. He who has seen the vision of his city upside-down has seen it the right way up.(52)

Maisie Ward, in an introduction to one of the posthumously published volumes of Chesterton, mentions the element of awe and seems to equate it with wonder:

> One of the strongest elements in this philosophy is the need for wonder and awe in face of the world of fact, and we find this element in his earliest treatment of the subject of fairy tales.(53)

We think that the religious awe is just one element of the virtue of wonder.

Cammaerts has this to say about the same matter:

> I am not prepared to say whether Chesterton's faith preserved his sense of wonder or whether his poetical instinct preserved and confirmed his faith. With him the two things are inseparable. We are not dealing with a passing phase in a man's life, but with an essential element of his personality.(54)

Thus Ward equates awe and wonder and Cammaerts is uncertain whether the religious element precedes or follows wonder. The reason for their confusion is that awe is an integral part of wonder. In fact, Cammaerts himself bears witness to this when he makes them practically simultaneous in this related passage:

> When he looked at the stars he was not so much awed by the distance which separated him from them, as

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(52) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 78.

(53) Maise WARD, in Introduction to The Coloured Lands by G. K. Chesterton, p. 10.

(54) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 47.

> by their unutterable beauty, and by the magic gift he possesses to perceive their light. The more he pondered on religion . . . the more amazing God and His world became to him.(55)

Thus Mr. Shaw, with whom we began this discussion of religious awe, is rightly denounced by Chesterton: "For the truth is that Mr. Shaw has never seen things as they really are. If he had he would have fallen on his knees before them."(56)

The most edifying example of religious awe is seen in Chesterton himself when we read of his profound reverence with regard to the Holy Eucharist: "'I am frightened,' Gilbert had said to Father Walker, 'of that tremendous Reality.'"(57) When Holy Communion was brought to his sick wife he is reported as saying: "'I am a simple man and I am afraid when God comes to my house.'"(58)

V. HUMILITY

The fifth part of wonder is humility, an element which is intimately bound up with the fourth element of religious awe.

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(55) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 47.

(56) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 63.

(57) Maisie WARD, The Return to Chesterton, p. 299.

(58) Ibid., p. 293.

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Humility is necessary as an integral part of wonder:

> Humility is the thing which is for ever renewing the earth and the stars. It is humility, and not duty, which preserves the stars from wrong, from the unpardonable wrong of casual resignation; it is through humility that the most ancient heavens for us are fresh and strong. The curse that came before history has laid on us all a tendency to be weary of wonders. If we saw the sun for the first time it would be the most fearful and beautiful of meteors. Now that we see it for the hundredth time we call it, in the hideous and blasphemous phrase of Wordsworth, "the light of common day." We are inclined to increase our claims. We are inclined to demand six suns, to demand a blue sun, to demand a green sun. Humility is perpetually putting us back in the primal darkness. There all light is lightning, startling and instantaneous. Until we understand that original dark, in which we have neither sight nor expectation, we can give no hearty and childlike praise to the splendid sensationalism of things.(59)

Chesterton carries on the same idea:

> The man who destroys himself creates the universe. To the humble man and to the humble man alone, the sun is really a sun; to the humble man, and to the humble man alone, the sea is really a sea. When he looks at all the faces in the street, he does not only realize that men are alive, he realizes with a dramatic pleasure that they are not dead.(60)

When we take in hand his St. Francis of Assisi after reading these passages from Heretics we feel that he is merely picking up again where he left off about twenty years earlier:

> It was by this deliberate idea of starting from zero, from the dark nothingness of his own deserts, that he /St. Francis/ did come to enjoy even earthly things

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(59) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 164.

(60) Ibid., p. 165.

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> as few people have enjoyed them; and they are in themselves the best working example of the idea. For there is no way in which a man can earn a star or deserve a sunset. But there is more than this involved, and more indeed than is easily expressed in words. It is not only true that the less a man thinks of himself, the more he thinks of his good luck and of all the gifts of God. It is also true that he sees more of the things themselves when he sees more of their origin; for their origin is part of them and indeed the most important part of them. Thus they become more extraordinary by being explained. He has more wonder at them but less fear of them, for a thing is really wonderful when it is significant and not when it is insignificant . . . . (61)

Note the many ideas we have worked with which are summarized in the above quotation. Chesterton begins with the idea of humility causing a love of things, which is enhanced by his appreciation of their origin, therefore by their connection with religious awe. He "sees more" and they become wonderful to him - objects of the virtue of wonder.

Chesterton brings in the necessity of humility to wonder not only in his essays, but even in a novel called The Ball and the Cross. One of the characters in this novel has just been preserved from falling to his death from the steeple of St. Paul's in London. Here is his reaction:

> He felt the full warmth of that pleasure which not only goes with humiliation, but which almost is humiliation. Men who have escaped death by a hair have it, and men whose love is returned by a woman unexpectedly, and men whose sins are forgiven them. Everything his eye fell on it feasted on, not aesthetically, but with a plain, jolly appetite as of a boy eating buns. He relished the squareness of the houses; he liked their clean angles as if he had

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(61) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 75.

> just cut them with a knife. The lit squares of the shop windows excited him as the young are excited by the lit stage of some promising pantomime . . . . He was, perhaps, the happiest of all the children of men. For in that unendurable instant when he hung, half slipping, to the ball of St. Paul's the whole universe had been destroyed and recreated.(62)

Even in Chesterton's poems the same thought is expressed:

> Through what fierce incarnations, furled,
> In fire and darkness, did I go,
> Ere I was worthy in the world
> To see a dandelion grow?(63)

In the same poem he talks of growing "worthy of the grass".

We need effort to attain to the practice of wonder and to maintain its existence in our souls; or else we shall fall into the groove carved by the plodding boredom of the pessimist:

> In the same way, alas! we all go on every day, unless we are continually goading ourselves into gratitude and humility, seeing less and less of the significance of the sky or the stones.(64)

As Ward did with religious awe, so Lea does with humility - makes it the equivalent of wonder:

> And it is just this attitude of more than intellectual humility, which he equated with the spontaneous "wonder" of children - the vision uncorrupted by theory or convention - that Chesterton made it his life-work to preach and practice.(65)

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(62) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Ball and the Cross, pp. 24-25.

(63) IDEM, The Beatific Vision in The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, p. 309.

(64) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, p. 85.

(65) F. A. LEA, The Wild Knight of Battersea, p. 14.

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Certainly humility is not the same thing as wonder by definition. Humility is, just as we have said earlier about religious awe, an integral part of the virtue of wonder, not an equivalent. It is necessary for the perfection of the virtue of wonder.

Cammaerts offers Chesterton himself as a model of this humility:

> He felt throughout that he never deserved the blessings he received, that he was not worthy of the joys and sufferings he experienced. Although he never lost sight of the gulf separating good and evil intentions, as far as man's mind was concerned, he took the universe as a whole, with all its problems and contradictions, as a wonderful gift for which he could never be sufficiently thankful.(66)

Humility is necessary to practice the virtue of wonder, first of all, with regard to ourselves: "It needs a great deal of brutal sincerity and humility to 'realize' oneself."(67) Humility is necessary also to appreciate other things that God has made; the only way to enjoy these masterpieces of God's work is to feel unworthy of them.

VI. CHILDLIKENESS

The sixth integral part of wonder is the element of childlikeness, including, of course, the ingredients of innocence and simplicity. These are things which bring us

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(66) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 47.

(67) Ibid., p. 59.

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to that wisdom which is the virtue of wonder. As Chesterton says of himself: " . . . I was a much wiser and wider-minded person at the age of six than at the age of sixteen."(68)

We are naturally reminded of the words of Christ: "'Amen I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'"(69) This writer recalls an incident when an unusually perceptive sceptic, when this line of Sacred Scripture was quoted to him, immediately interpreted it as a rebuke to his scepticism and as an order to accept the dictates of common sense rather than the befuddled views of his ever-doubting dons. Certainly Chesterton would interpret these words of Christ in the same light.

Chesterton had this esteem for childlikeness from the very beginnings of his philosophical ruminations. We find traces of it in his very first year of publication, with something very serious behind the apparent flippancy of his book of comic verse:

> But youth's black storms are gone and past,
> Bare is each aged brow;
> And since with age we're growing bald,
> Let us be babies now.(70)

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(68) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, p. 52.

(69) Mt. 18, 3.

(70) G. K. CHESTERTON, Greybeards at Play, p. vi.

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Here is another stanza of the same poem:

> Hoary and bent I dance one hour:
> What tho I die at morn?
> There is a shout among the stars,
> "Tonight a child is born."(71)

To Chesterton the child is the "sage of whom I learn":

> I looked into his awful eyes:
> I waited his decree:
> I made ingenious attempts
> To sit upon his knee.(72)

In Orthodoxy he makes his profession of faith in the creed of the children's world: "My first and last philosophy, (that which I believe) with unbroken certainty, I learnt in the nursery."(73)

This is in accord with his opinion expressed in The Everlasting Man later on that "first thoughts are best."(74)

Chesterton is called by West "the everlasting boy".(75) West is right in content, though wrong, very wrong, in the disparaging spirit in which he uses the phrase.

Chesterton explains without parables his whole attitude on this subject of childlikeness:

> Now much of the craving for novelty comes from the swiftness of satiety; and most of the swiftness of

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(71) G. K. CHESTERTON, Greybeards at Play, p. ix.

(72) Ibid., p. 101.

(73) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 87.

(74) IDEM, The Everlasting Man, p. 341.

(75) Julius WEST, G. K. Chesterton, A Critical Study, p. 117.

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> satiety comes from the restlessness of sin. And the whole Christian idea and imagery in these things, of being born again, of renewing our youth like the eagles, of becoming like little children, of drinking living water so that we never thirst again - all these things represent the idea that our ultimate triumph must be in gaining the power of never wearying, and not merely in always having something fresh of which to grow weary.
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> We all know that the Divine Authority itself selected the example of the child. We most of us know that this corresponds to a certain psychological fact even in our own experience; that some memories of childhood do have this very indescribable character of a positive and timeless pleasure. And this fact of psychology obviously fits in with the dogma of theology; it suggests that the more rapid exhaustion of our emotions is probably due to our more mature misuse of them.(76)

In the same article there is another plain statement:

> The poetic attractiveness of childhood is really the heritage of the Christian idea that sin separates us from beatitude, and a witness to its truth; to the saying that the pure in heart can see God.(77)

In one of Chesterton's detective stories one of the characters is made to give expression to a similar idea based on another aspect of the childlike spirit: "'Man is a creature; all his happiness consists in being a creature; or, as the Great Voice commanded us, in becoming a child.'"(78)

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(76) G. K. CHESTERTON, Where Shall We Begin? in America, Vol. 39, no. 18, (August 11, 1928), p. 422.

(77) Ibid.

(78) IDEM, The Poet and the Lunatics, p. 104.

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CONCLUSIONS

This, then, concludes our discussion of the six elements, the six integral parts, that enter into the compound which is called the virtue of wonder. First comes the element of observation, the power of really seeing what we see; secondly, the component of enthusiasm, the taking of things with the savory salt of surprise; thirdly, the love of things, an imitation of the love with which God loves His creation and a rejection of Manicheism; fourthly, the spirit of religious awe with which all things must be regarded in view of the recognition of their origin; fifthly, the constituent of humility, which makes us appreciate something by knowing the difference between something and nothing, by an acknowledgment of the contingency of our own being and the being of all other things; and lastly, the rather comprehensive ingredient of childlikeness, that principle of wonder which helps make all the above parts move into the heart of man more easily in order to help form the virtue of wonder.

We have, therefore, thus far discussed the definition of the virtue of wonder and its parts. Next we turn to the effects of wonder. Just as charity is described by St. Thomas as having the effects of joy and of peace, etc., so wonder, too, has the effects of joy and a spirit of gratitude, etc. These effects we shall discuss in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE EFFECTS OF WONDER 1 -

GRATITUDE AND JOY

The effects of the practice of the virtue of wonder are gratitude and praise; joy, humor; camaraderie and democracy; and valor or the willingness to fight for things of value.

FIRST EFFECT - GRATITUDE (AND PRAISE)

Chesterton quotes Rossetti as saying somewhere that "the worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank."(1) Thus Chesterton links the religious awe of which we have spoken with the effect of wonder called gratitude. We see that he considered constant thankfulness as an essential characteristic of his ideal man: "The great saint may be said to mix all his thoughts with thanks."(2) In this whole context from which we have quoted above, the gratitude is based on the idea of contingency, the dependence of man on the Necessary Being. The illumination which comes from this discovery or realization of dependency "is the discovery of an infinite debt."(3)

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 78.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., p. 79.

It is true that the rational man must realize also that he can never pay this infinite debt, but:

> It is the highest and holiest of paradoxes that the man who really knows he cannot pay his debt will be for ever paying it. He will be for ever giving back what he cannot give back, and cannot be expected to give back. He will be always throwing things away into a bottomless pit of unfathomable thanks.(4)

Chesterton links gratitude with another element of wonder, namely enthusiasm or surprise: "Human beings are happy so long as they retain the receptive power and the power of reaction in surprise and gratitude to something outside."(5)

It is bound up with the element of humility, too: "The truth is, that all genuine appreciation rests on a certain mystery of humility . . . . "(6)

The importance of this effect of gratitude resulting from wonder cannot be overestimated as far as Chesterton is concerned. In his Autobiography he calls it "the chief idea of my life; I will not say the doctrine I have always taught, but the doctrine I should always have liked to teach. That is the idea of taking things with gratitude, and not taking things for granted."(7) In another book he claims:

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(4) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 80.

(5) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 252.

(6) IDEM, Heretics, p. 65.

(7) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 342.

"I have often done the little I could to correct the stale trick of taking things for granted: all the more because it is not even taking them for granted. It is taking them without gratitude; that is, emphatically as not granted."(8) It is not only to him personally that this matter is so important; it is of the greatest distinction in itself and for all men: "I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought; and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder."(9)

In Orthodoxy he puts it differently: "The test of all happiness is gratitude . . . . "(10)

Chesterton therefore considers gratitude to be an essential characteristic of the holy man and at the same time a requisite for the truly happy man.

The roots of gratitude are in wonder at the very miracle of birth: "We thank people for birthday presents of cigars and slippers. Can I thank no one for the birthday present of birth?"(11) In one of his poems entitled By the Babe Unborn the same idea is expressed:

I think that if they gave me leave
Within that world to stand,

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(8) G. K. CHESTERTON, Irish Impressions, p. 24.

(9) IDEM, A Short History of England, p. 59.

(10) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 98.

(11) Ibid.

I would be good through all the day
I spent in fairyland.

They should not hear a word from me
Of selfishness or scorn,
If only I could find the door,
If only I were born.(12)

From the time of the unborn babe to the lengths of all eternity gratitude should remain. This he makes clear in yet another poem:

In heaven I shall stand on gold and glass,
Still brooding earth's arithmetic to spell;
Or see the fading of the fires of hell
Ere I have thanked my God for all the grass.(13)

The reason some of his best expressions of the necessity of gratitude are contained in poetical form is perhaps what he says in his book on Dickens: "Real primary creation (such as the sun or the birth of a child) calls forth not criticism, not appreciation, but a kind of incoherent gratitude."(14) This "incoherent gratitude" is possibly more coherently expressed in poetry. He began even in his early Notebook thus to manifest his thanks:

"You say grace before meals.
All right.
But I say grace before the play and the opera,
And grace before the concert and pantomime,
And grace before I open a book,
And grace before sketching, painting,

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(12) G. K. CHESTERTON, By the Babe Unborn, in The Wild Knight, p. 3.

(13) Ibid., p. 45.

(14) IDEM, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, p. 174.

Swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing;
And grace before I dip the pen in the ink"(15)

Nothing is too insignificant to thank God for. He thanks God for "'the stones in the street'", the "'hay-carts'", the "'houses built and half-built.'"(16) Every little thing calls forth gratitude; and so does every moment of time, every day:

"Here dies another day
During which I have had eyes, ears, hands
And the great world round me;
And with tomorrow begins another.
Why am I allowed two?"(17)

Chesterton associates himself with a man whom he admired for fighting for gratitude:

> He was making war against no trivial human sins, but against godless and thankless quiescence, against getting used to happiness, the mystic sin by which all creation fell.(18)

The man is Savonarola. The greatest example of a truly grateful man, however, is St. Francis of Assisi:

> He was above all things a great giver; and he cared chiefly for the best kind of giving which is called thanksgiving . . . . He understood down to its very depths the theory of thanks; and its depths are a bottomless abyss. He knew that the praise of God stands on its strongest ground when it stands on nothing. He knew that we can best measure the

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(15) G. K. CHESTERTON, from his Notebook, quoted in Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 61.

(16) Ibid., p. 62

(17) Ibid.

(18) IDEM, Varied Types, p. 149.

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> towering miracle of the mere fact of existence if we realize that but for some strange mercy we should not even exist.(19)

Chesterton's chief fictional character used to present his ideas on gratitude is the same "Innocent Smith" in Manalive of whom we have written in the third part of the third chapter above. We recall how he awakened the sceptical professor to a love of things and therefore to an appreciation of them and gratitude to God for them.

For other people Chesterton himself will stand always as a model for the properly grateful spirit. Never did he take things for granted, never did he look thru an eye blinded with cynicism. The wonder he felt was that God from all eternity had thought of creating for man's joy. He was grateful that God had made things to give joy to man, but more, that to enjoy these things God had also created him.

Chesterton tells us how important this sentiment of gratitude was to him personally in the development of his philosophy:

> My own thought, when it was not yet Catholic, was often blasted with the name of Optimist; but it was not quite as bad as that sounds today. It was an attempt to hold on to religion by the thread of thanks for our creation; by the praise of existence and of created things.(20)

We have used the word "praise" in conjunction with our

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(19) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Francis of Assisi, pp. 156-157.

(20) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 241.

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title for this section of the chapter dealing with gratitude. Chesterton's use of the word above shows how immediately the idea of praise of God follows upon the realization of the gratitude due. In another context he does the same thing. After talking about wonder and the appreciation of "a daisy", he regrets that "it is only rarely that we realize . . . the primeval duty of Praise."(21)

As to our positing gratitude as an effect of wonder, we have in agreement two of the best commentators on Chesterton, Reckitt and Cammaerts. Reckitt writes of "that fundamental revelation of wonder, and its efflux of thanksgiving, which I have already emphasized as the formative influence of his life."(22) Cammaerts says: "Wonder leads to happiness and happiness to gratitude."(23)

We have said enough, but not too much, about this matter of gratitude; at least it is not too much if we are to accept the flash of insight to which Pfleger lays claim:

> If he has any definite ambition it is, if I read aright between the lines of his St. Francis, this: to be like the Poverello God's fool and on his own initiative and in his own way to praise the work of His omnipotence, the permanent miracle of the world.(24)

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(21) G. K. CHESTERTON, Chaucer, p. 34.

(22) Maurice B. RECKITT, G. K. Chesterton, a Christian Prophet for England Today, p. 23.

(23) Emile CAMMAERTS, The Laughing Prophet, p. 46.

(24) Karl PFLEGER, Wrestlers With Christ, p. 181.

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We have now but to add one word on the opposite vice, ingratitude. The only point we wish to make regarding this matter is Chesterton's own personal horror of this defect. Such ingratitude, he said, is all "based on the strange and staggering heresy that a human being has a right to dandelions . . . that we owe no thanks for them at all and need feel no wonder at them at all; and above all no wonder at being thought worthy to receive them."(25) He calls this the sin of "Presumption and the name of its twin brother is Despair."(26) Sin "is perhaps most horrible to me because it is ingratitude."(27)

SECOND EFFECT - JOY

The second result of wonder is joy, laughter, humor. Someone quotes an unidentified satirist on University life in the time of Chestertonian influence:

> "Where Chestertonian youths five things revere:
> Beef, noise, the Church, vulgarity, and beer."(28)

The writer exonerates Chesterton from the blame:

> But a man is not responsible for all the indiscretions of his followers: and I think it was not always realized, either by the critics or by the followers

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(25) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, p. 344.

(26) Ibid.

(27) Ibid., p. 353.

(28) Dorothy L. SAYERS, Preface to The Surprise by G. K. Chesterton, p. 6.

> themselves, how sound a theological basis underlay all the flourishes of paradoxical wit.(29)

Certainly Chesterton had a sound basis for the joyful spirit that he spread. The solid foundation for joy was the virtue of wonder. As a result of his teachings, Chesterton was followed by these young men as a "kind of Christian liberator."(30) To that youth: "It was therefore stimulating to be told that Christianity was not a dull thing but a gay thing, not a stick-in-the-mud thing but an adventurous thing . . . . "(31)

In our discussion of the definition of wonder we rejected Lea's statement about the equation of wonder with humor. Yet the fact that anyone would make such a statement shows how close the connection is between these two elements.

We shall later discuss humor and laughter in connection with the problem of evil. To Chesterton it was really a religious problem: "I do not like seriousness. I think it is irreligious."(32) He maintained that "in everything that does cover the whole of your life - in your philosophy and your religion - you must have mirth. If you do not have mirth you will certainly have madness."(33)

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(29) Dorothy L. SAYERS, Preface to The Surprise by G. K. Chesterton, p. 6.

(30) Ibid., p. 5.

(31) Ibid.

(32) G. K. CHESTERTON, Uses of Diversity, p. 1.

(33) IDEM, Lunacy and Letters, p. 97.

This joyfulness that we should have is a natural effect of the practice of the virtue of wonder. If it were not for original sin, we would feel this effect in more abundant measure:

> I had not lost, and I have never lost, the conviction that such primal things are mysterious and amazing; but if they were amazing, why did anybody have to remind us that they were amazing? . . . Creation was of the Creator and declared as good; the power in it could be praised by angels forever and by the sons of God shouting for joy. If we were ourselves only occasionally overheard in the act of shouting for joy, it was because we were only partially or imperfectly the sons of God . . . . (34)

Chesterton answers to the charge that he treats life in a riotous manner:

> I reply that life is a riot. And I say that the Universe as I see it, at any rate, is . . . like the fireworks at the Crystal Palace . . . . About the whole cosmos there is a tense and secret festivity - like preparations for Guy Fawkes' day. Eternity is the eve of something. I never look up at the stars without feeling that they are the fires of a schoolboy's rocket, fixed in their everlasting fall.(35)

The two examples Chesterton offers as illustrations of joy resulting from wonder are Robert Louis Stevenson and St. Francis of Assisi. He says that Stevenson practiced the "asceticism of cheerfulness" and the reason for it was that:

> Stevenson's enormous capacity for joy flowed directly out of his profoundly religious temperament. He conceived himself as an important guest at one eternal and uproarious banquet, and, instead of grumbling at the soup, he accepted it with that careless

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(34) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common Man, p. 243.

(35) IDEM, Heretics, p. 233.

> gratitude which marks the baby and the real man of the world. He rode on the great galloping gift-horse of existence with the joy of a horseman at once dexterous and reckless, and did not, like so many more ambitious philosophers, nearly fall off in his desperate efforts to look the gift-horse in the mouth.
>
> His gaiety was neither the gaiety of the Pagan nor the gaiety of the bon vivant. It was the greater gaiety of the mystic. He could enjoy trifles, because to him there was no such thing as a trifle. He was a child who respected his dolls because they were the images of the image of God; portraits at only two removes. He was a boy who thought his fireworks were as splendid as the stars, but it was only because he thought the stars were as youthful and as festive as the fireworks.(36)

Long before he wrote an entire book on St. Francis, Chesterton was intrigued by the personality of the saint. Francis, an expert in wonder, was also an expert in happiness.

> He expressed in loftier and bolder language than any earthly thinker the conception that laughter is as divine as tears. He called his monks the mountebanks of God. He never forgot to take pleasure in a bird as it flashed past him, or a drop of water, as it fell from his finger: he was, perhaps, the happiest of the sons of men.(37)

Chesterton maintains that the joy of St. Francis stemmed from his gratitude: "This gratitude produced . . . the most purely joyful.moments that have been known to man."(38) Our author rightly says: "It may seem a paradox to say that a

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(36) G. K. CHESTERTON, A Handful of Authors, p. 3.

(37) IDEM, Varied Types, p. 67.

(38) IDEM, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 78.

man may be transported with joy to discover that he is in debt."(39) But he goes on to explain that in human affairs the creditor does not share the transports of joy of a debtor, especially when the debt is unpayable; but in the great love between the Creator and His creature the Creator can take pleasure in this debt and the human can take pleasure in his efforts to show appreciation.

In the next chapter we are going to mention penance and sacrifice as means to attain the virtue of wonder. Chesterton mentions joy even in this penance as a result of wonder. There is, therefore, this distinction. Penance, as we shall see, is to be practiced as a means of acquiring the virtue of wonder; but it is only after its partial acquisition that we begin to practice penance with the same attitude as did Francis:

> Men will ask what selfish sort of woman it must have been who ruthlessly exacted tribute in the form of flowers, or what avaricious creature she can have been to demand solid gold in the form of a ring; just as they ask what cruel kind of God can have demanded sacrifice and self-denial. They will have lost the clue to all that lovers have meant by love; and will not understand that it was because the thing was not demanded that it was done.(40)

Not only is it done willingly; but there is an eagerness as with St. Francis:

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(39) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 79.

(40) Ibid, pp. 80-81.

He flung himself into fasting and vigil exactly as he had flung himself furiously into battle . . . . There was nothing negative about it; it was not a regimen or a stoical simplicity of life. It was not self-denial merely in the sense of self-control. It was as positive as a passion; it had all the air of being as positive as a pleasure. He devoured fasting as a man devours food. He plunged after poverty as men have dug madly for gold.(41)

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(41) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 81.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EFFECTS OF WONDER II

CAMARADERIE AND DEMOCRACY

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THIRD EFFECT - CAMARADERIE AND DEMOCRACY

The third effect of the spirit of wonder is camaraderie or, in an expanded sense, the force of democracy. Let us take the narrow sense first.

> The love of humanity is a thing supposed to be professed only by vulgar and officious philanthropists, or by saints of a superhuman detachment and universality. As a matter of fact, love of humanity is the commonest and most natural of the feelings of a fresh nature, and almost every one has felt it alight capriciously upon him when looking at a crowded park or a room full of dancers.(1)

We note the words, "the feelings of a fresh nature", which freshness is the enthusiasm or "surprise" attitude of which we spoke before. There is, therefore, a connection in the mind of Chesterton between this part of the virtue of wonder and camaraderie. There is also a connection here between the other part of the virtue of wonder called the love of things and this third effect of the virtue.

Sometimes these things that we love are simply symbols of a higher love; the love of the irrational creature becomes a sign of the love of the rational creature. Thus in

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, Robert Browning, p. 43.

Browning's poetry Chesterton finds such significance:

> It does not deal much with abstractions; it is the truest of all love poetry, because it does not speak much about love. It awakens in every man the memories of that immortal instant when common and dead things had a meaning beyond the power of any dictionary to utter and a value beyond the power of any millionaire to compute.(2)

The rational creature is loveable in himself, because he is good. If all the things in the cosmos are good, this microcosm, man, is surely good. The element of wonder called the love of things means the love of all creation; and obviously means so much the more the love of men.

We must see man in the light of wonder. A conversation in one of Chesterton's novels runs as follows:

> "A jolly old creature," said Turnbull, "he didn't seem able to get much beyond that fact that a man is a man."
>
> "Has anybody got beyond it?" asked MacIan.
>
> Turnbull looked at him curiously. "Are you turning an agnostic?" he asked.
>
> "Oh, you do not understand!" cried out MacIan. "We Catholics are all agnostics. We Catholics have only in that sense got as far as realizing that a man is a man. But your Ibsens and your Zolas and your Shaws and your Tolstoys have not even got so far."(3)

What he means is seen in a sentence from another book: "The idea of the equality of men is in substance simply the idea of the importance of man."(4)

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(2) G. K. CHESTERTON, Robert Browning, p. 49.

(3) IDEM, The Ball and the Cross, pp. 141-142.

(4) IDEM, Short History of England, p. 203.

There is, besides the dignity of man, another meaning inherent in those words: "Generally speaking, the ordinary man should be content with the terrible secret that men are men - which is another way of saying that they are brothers."(5)

To practice the camaraderie which is to Chesterton a natural consequence of this doctrine, it is necessary to bring in another part of wonder - humility:

> Alone of all superiors, the saint does not depress the human dignity of others. He is not conscious of his superiority to them; but only more conscious of his inferiority than they are.(6)

Humanitarianism lacks this humility. Chesterton blames Voltaire for this: "He started the horrible habit of helping human beings only through pitying them and never through respecting them."(7)

Yet it is difficult to possess this attitude toward our fellow men with a spirit of deep sincerity:

> We have to look at men in a certain light in order to love them all; and the most agnostic of us know that it is not exactly identical with the light of common day.(8)

It is difficult to love all of the five people sitting

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(5) G. K. CHESTERTON, Uses of Diversity, p. 166.

(6) IDEM, Short History of England, p. 14.

(7) IDEM, The End of the Armistice, p. 31.

(8) IDEM, from Introduction to Will Men be Like Gods?, by Owen Francis Dudley, p. ix.

across from you in a railway car, yet: "All these are sacred beings of equal value in the sight of God with the souls of Hildebrand and Shakespeare; but a man needs to be a little of a mystic to think so; or even to feel anything like it."(9) The Father Brown of Chesterton's detective stories expresses the same sentiments: "'All men matter. You matter. I matter. It's the hardest thing in theology to believe.'"(10)

What, then, is the solution to this difficulty? "It is the paradox that it is more possible to love men indirectly than to love them directly.(11)

How is this indirect loving to be accomplished?

> It may be difficult to get a fat burgess and a fierce and hungry robber to love each other; but it is much easier to get them both to love St. Francis of Assisi for being able to love them both. And what is true of St. Francis is more true of his Divine model; men can admire perfect charity before they practice even imperfect charity; and that is by far the most practical way of getting them to practice it. It is not to leave men merely staring at each other and standing face to face to criticize and grow weary; it is rather to see them standing side by side and looking out together at a third thing; the world's desire and the love-affair of

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(9) G. K. CHESTERTON, from Introduction to Will Men Be Like Gods?, by Owen Francis Dudley, p. ix.

(10) IDEM, from The Scandal of Father Brown, excerpt as in The Amazing Adventures of Father Brown, p. 166.

(11) IDEM, in Introduction to Will Men Be Like Gods? by Owen Francis Dudley, p. viii.

> all humanity; which is really a human sun that can shine upon the evil and the good.(12)

The reason we love one another, therefore, should be because together we love God, together we are aimed at the same final End. We should love our neighbor, too, because he is a "walking and speaking statue of God".(13) We should take the same attitude as did Scott in his novels:

> Scott was fond of describing kings in disguise. But all his characters are kings in disguise. He was, with all his errors, profoundly possessed with the old religious conception (the only possible democratic basis), the idea that man himself is a king in disguise.(14)

Scott wrote about this course of behavior; but St. Francis lived it: "For he treated the whole mob of men as a mob of kings."(15)

To whom should this love and this camaraderie be extended? To those whom God has placed there to be loved. "We make our friends; we make our enemies; but God makes our next-door neighbour."(16)

We may have special reasons for loving this one or that one, but " . . . we have to love our neighbor because he is

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(12) G. K. CHESTERTON, in Introduction to Will Men Be Gods?, by Owen Francis Dudley, p. x.

(13) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, p. 110.

(14) IDEM, Charles Dickens, p. 177.

(15) IDEM, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 97.

(16) IDEM, Heretics, p. 185.

there . . . . He is the sample of humanity which is actually given us. Precisely because he may be anybody he is everybody. He is a symbol because he is an accident."(17)

So Chesterton is impatient with humanitarian talk about the love of humanity:

> Before any modern man talks with authority about loving men, I insist (I insist with violence) that he shall always be very much pleased when his barber tries to talk to him. His barber is humanity; let him love that. If he is not pleased at this, I will not accept any substitute in the way of interest in the Congo or in the future of Japan. If a man cannot love his barber whom he has seen, how shall he love the Japanese whom he has not seen?(18)

The trouble with the humanitarians is that they do not base their claimed love of humanity on truth. The humanitarian "cannot be just to them without pretending that they are nice."(19) The attempts of the irreligious humanitarian to maintain in his own heart and mind the love of mankind is doomed to failure. In an essay entitled "Is Humanism a Religion?" Chesterton shows how the efforts made by men like Whitman to promote their kind of worship of man were bound to come to nothing in the long run, because it was only a matter of mood or emotion. For Chesterton himself,

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(17) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, pp. 186-187.

(18) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, p. 170.

(19) IDEM, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 86.

"this mystical idea, while it has evaporated as a mood, still exists as a creed."(20)

The fact that there is no substantial dogma behind the humanitarian desires leads in practice to these devotees going to

> The villas and the chapels where
> I learned with little labour
> The way to love my fellow-man
> And hate my next-door neighbour.(21)

Chesterton specifies methods of learning to love false philosophers, sinners and criminals, those of a different class, race, or nation.

Here is his method regarding those who teach error:

> I will not pretend to sympathize with his philosophy as a truth; but I think it is quite possible to sympathize with it as an error; or, in other words, to understand how the error arose.(22)

Chesterton had no sympathy for the sociologists and criminologists who refused to condemn criminals on the basis that crime is merely a sickness which needs treatment. "It is not true, of course, that crime is a disease. It is criminology that is a disease."(23) Chesterton is angry because these people are taking away that which is really

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(20) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Thing, p. 17.

(21) IDEM, The World State in Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, p. 15.

(22) IDEM, Generally Speaking, pp. 247-248.

(23) IDEM, Fancies Versus Fads, p. 55.

human about the criminals; they are denying free will by refusing to blame them for their misdeeds. "For, after all, blame is itself a compliment. It is a compliment because it is an appeal; and an appeal to a man as a creative artist making his soul."(24) "When we rebuke a man for being a sinner, we imply that he has the powers of a saint."(25)

Chesterton means, therefore, that his charity, although refusing to exonerate a criminal on the basis of his not being to blame for his acts, will still forgive. "Stated baldly, charity certainly means one of two things - pardoning unpardonable acts, or loving unlovable people."(26) Just as the humanitarians try to pretend all people are loveable instead of facing the facts and still loving them, so do they try to pretend that the criminal acts are pardonable, instead of facing the facts as does the fictional Father Brown:

> "Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favourite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness . . . to console those who really need consolation; who do things really indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon. 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."(27)

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(24) G. K. CHESTERTON, Fancies Versus Fads, p. 103.

(25) Ibid., p. 105.

(26) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 174.

(27) IDEM, The Secret of Father Brown, p. 266.

Father Brown castigates the humanitarians, who are represented by a Lady Outram who says: "'There is a limit to human charity'". Father Brown retorts: "'There is . . . and that is the real difference between human charity and Christian charity . . . . it seems to me that you only pardon the sins that you don't really think sinful.'"(28)

Father Brown's great secret of detective proficiency is his ability to feel with the criminal, to put himself into his place and thus to surmise what he would do in the similar situation. "'You may think a crime horrible because you could never commit it. I think it horrible because I could commit it.'"(29)

English class distinctions found a severe critic in Chesterton. "The truth is that the ancient world was more familiar with its slaves than the modern world with its servants."(30) He offers this solution: "The true way to overcome the evil in class distinctions is not to denounce them as revolutionists denounce them, but to ignore them as children ignore them."(31)

He called racism "Anthropology gone mad" and said that

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(28) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Secret of Father Brown, p. 265.

(29) Ibid., p. 275.

(30) IDEM, Generally Speaking, p. 147.

(31) IDEM, Charles Dickens, p. 142.

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it means " . . . everlastingly looking for your countrymen in other people's countries."(32)

There is a particular evil in racism which is worse than that of excessive nationalism:

> The curse of race religion is that it makes each separate man the sacred image which he worships. His own bones are the sacred relics; his own blood is the blood of St. Januarius . . . . The French or the Irish . . . do not in fact generally show this sort of worship of the racial image in the individual. With them the patriot loves his country as a man loves a woman; but not as a man loves himself.(33)

It is mainly in his book about America that Chesterton has an extended discussion of charity among nations. He rejects the idea of promoting friendship among nations by seeking out their similarities. Their differences are the things that make them different nations. "Nations can love each other as men and women love each other, not because they are alike but because they are different."(34) An interest in foreign customs and the most varied things are the things that are most likely to produce a sympathy with another nation. He offers as examples Indian picture writing and negro melodies, etc.

Here again facing the facts is the way to solve the problem - with a sense of humor injected to help.

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(32) G. K. CHESTERTON, The End of the Armistice, p. 103.

(33) Ibid., pp. 111-112.

(34) IDEM, What I Saw in America, p. 285.

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> The first principle is that nobody should be ashamed of thinking a thing funny because it is foreign; the second is that he should be ashamed of thinking it wrong because it is funny. The reaction of his senses and the superficial habits of mind against something new, and to him abnormal, is a perfectly healthy reaction. But the mind which imagines that mere unfamiliarity can possibly prove anything about inferiority is a very inadequate mind.(35)

As examples for us to follow in the matter of love of neighbor Chesterton offers us Chaucer, Dickens, Browning, and St. Francis of Assisi.

He pays Chaucer the highest compliments:

> But Chaucer had the one thing needful; he had the frame of mind that is the ultimate result of right reason and a universal philosophy; the temper that is the flower and fruit of all the tillage and the toil of moralists and theologians. He had Charity; that is the heart and not merely the mind of our ancient Christendom . . . . (36)

As to Dickens: "The art of Dickens was the most exquisite of arts: it was the art of enjoying everybody."(37)

And of Browning he has this to say:

> Charity was his basic philosophy; but it was, as it were, a fierce charity, a charity that went man-hunting. He was a kind of cosmic detective who walked into the foulest of thieves' kitchens and accused men publicly of virtue.(38)

For Chesterton the greatest saint he felt he could present as a model of charity was St. Francis, who he considered

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(35) G. K. CHESTERTON, What I Saw in America, p. 2.

(36) IDEM, Chaucer, p. 260.

(37) IDEM, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 119.

(38) IDEM, Robert Browning, p. 52.

represented " . . . the presence of something new and seemingly almost anarchic; a deep tide driving out to uncharted seas of charity."(39) There were no limitations, no extra-territorial domains to Francis' realm of charity:

> He liked as he liked; he seems to have liked everybody, but especially those whom everybody disliked him for liking. Something very vast and universal was already present . . . . (40)

Chesterton himself by his own testimony regarding his attitude toward his fellow-man is outstanding in the virtue of charity and its expression in camaraderie. He loved all men: "I could say something nice (and true) about every man I have ever met."(41) He loved his enemies:

> Now, though men smite me on the face,
> I cannot curse the face of man.(42)

He goes so far as to claim: "You never loved your friends, my friends, as I shall love my foes."(43)

For further evidence of Chesterton's personal attributes in this regard, we refer back to the first chapter and the discussion on his character.

We have used the word "camaraderie" in this section

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(39) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 47.

(40) Ibid.

(41) IDEM, Utopia of Usurers, p. 16.

(42) IDEM, E. C. B. in The Wild Knight, p. 68.

(43) IDEM, The Last Hero in The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, p. 176.

because it was used by Chesterton in a rather lengthy discourse in his first book of social opinion; and because it represents in a special way the Chestertonian method of manifesting charity.

This camaraderie or comradeship of which he speaks is "simple to conduct; but it is by no means simple to analyze."(44) He refuses to equate it with love, passion, or friendship. He says it has three elements:

> First, it has a sort of broad philosophy like the common sky, emphasizing that we are all under the same cosmic conditions. We are all in the same boat . . . . Secondly, it recognizes this bond as the essential one; for comradship is simply humanity seen in that one aspect in which men are really equal . . . . Lastly, it contains the third quality . . . the insistence upon the body and its indispensable satisfaction. No one has even begun to understand comradeship who does not accept with it a certain hearty eagerness in eating, drinking, or smoking, an uproarious materialism which to many women appears only hoggish. You may call the thing an orgy or a sacrament; it is certainly an essential. It is at root a resistance to the superciliousness of the individual. Nay, its very swaggering and howling are humble. In the heart of its rowdiness there is a sort of mad modesty; a desire to melt the separate soul into the mass of unpretentious masculinity. It is a clamorous confession of the weakness of all flesh. No man must be superior to the things that are common to men. This sort of equality must be bodily and gross and comic. Not only are we all in the same boat, but we are all seasick.(45)

Because of the dangers that seem rather evident from this sort of thing, we have the precautions of the discipline

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(44) G. K. CHESTERTON, What's Wrong With The World?, p. 108.

(45) Ibid., pp. 109-111.

of monastic life or of military rule for soldiers when men are left to themselves. As for married men, Chesterton maintains they are sufficiently controlled by women.

The brotherhood encouraged by St. Francis of Assisi Chesterton describes as " . . . a camaraderie actually founded on courtesy."(46)

We have discussed the third effect of the virtue of wonder in its restricted individual meaning of comradeship; we now turn to its social manifestation in the patterns of democracy.

The natural basis for democracy as seen by Chesterton is that: "We men and women are all in the same boat, upon a stormy sea. We owe to each other a terrible and tragic loyalty."(47) There must also be the recognition of the worth and the dignity of each person: " . . . if the individual is nothing, then the race is nothing - for the plain mathematical reason that a hundred times nought is nought."(48)

Just as Chesterton found through his own life experience that the mood or emotion basis for personal charity is not enough, so he drew the same conclusion about the foundations of democracy. The natural is not enough:

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(46) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 95.

(47) IDEM, All Things Considered, p. 212.

(48) IDEM, A Handful of Authors, p. 44.

> There is no basis for democracy except in a dogma about the divine origin of man. That is a perfectly simple fact which the modern world will find out more and more to be a fact. Every other basis is a sort of sentimental confusion, full of merely verbal echoes of the older creeds. Those verbal associations are always vain for the vital purpose of constraining the tyrant. An idealist may say to a capitalist, "Don't you sometimes feel in the rich twilight, when the lights twinkle from the distant hamlet in the hills, that all humanity is a holy family?" But it is equally possible for the capitalist to reply with brevity and decision, "No, I don't" and there is no more disputing about it further than about the beauty of a fading cloud. And the modern world of moods is a world of clouds, even if some of them are thunderclouds.(49)

For a firm basis for democracy, then, we must see the divine in our neighbor:

> But now a great thing in the street
> Seems any human nod,
> Where shift in strange democracy
> The million masks of God.(50)

Since this supernatural basis is so important, it is to be expected that the matter is somewhere discussed in the literature of the Church, and so it was: "Blessed Robert Bellarmine said all there is to be said for democracy before any ordinary worldling dared to be a democrat...."(51)

We are interested here in the special connection of democracy with the spirit of wonder. Above we have seen

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(49) G. K. CHESTERTON, What I Saw in America, p. 305.

(50) IDEM, Gold Leaves in The Wild Knight, p. 26.

(51) IDEM, The Well and the Shallows, p. 62.

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the relationship of religious awe to respect of our fellow-men. On the purely natural level, in order to have the true spirit of democracy, man must be realized as man - and wondered at as man. Chesterton makes this clear in Orthodoxy, when he states the two principles of democracy:

> The first is this: that the things common to all men are more important than the things peculiar to any men. Ordinary things are more valuable than extraordinary things; nay, they are more extraordinary. Man is something more awful than men; something more strange. The sense of the miracle of humanity itself should be always more vivid to us than any marvels of power, intellect, art, or civilization. The mere man on two legs, as such, should be felt as something more heartbreaking than any music and more startling than any caricature . . . .
>
> This is the first principle of democracy; that the essential things in men are the things they hold in common, not the things they hold separately. And the second principle is merely this: that the political instinct or desire is one of these things which they hold in common . . . . In short, the democratic faith is this: that the most terribly important things must be left to ordinary men themselves - the mating of the sexes, the rearing of the young, the laws of the state. This is democracy; and in this I have always believed.(52)

This instinct for democracy Chesterton calls the "real and deep desire of all masculine men for equality."(53) Great minds, he says, take it for granted:

> All very great teachers and leaders have had this habit of assuming their point of view to be one which was human and casual, one which would readily appeal to every passing man. If a man is genuinely superior to his fellows the first thing that he believes in is the equality of man. We can see this,

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(52) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 82-84.

(53) IDEM, The Return of Don Quixote, p. 113.

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> for instance, in that strange and innocent rationality with which Christ addressed any motley crowd that happened to stand about Him. "What man of you having a hundred sheep, and losing one, would not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which was lost?" Or, again, "What man of you if his son ask for bread will he give him a stone, or if he ask for a fish will he give him a serpent?" This plainess, this almost prosaic camaraderie, is the note of all very great minds.(54)

The truly democratic spirit is intertwined with the part of wonder we have called humility. "The real ground upon which Christianity and democracy are one . . . . must be this - that the man should rule who does not think that he can rule."(55) Chesterton goes on to show further the role of humility in democratic procedures. He says that voting is " . . . an attempt to get at the opinion of those who would be too modest to offer it."(56) And canvassing is " . . . encouraging the humble; it is saying to the modest man, 'Friend, go up higher.'(57)

Although Chesterton is enthusiastic about democracy, he is not at all blind to its difficulties and to the faults of democracy as it operates in practice:

> I do really believe that self-government is the most normal and the most noble sort of government, when

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(54) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, pp. 245-246.

(55) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 220.

(56) Ibid., p. 221.

(57) Ibid., p. 222.

you can get it, though it is possibly the most difficult to get.(58)

For the sake of completeness we include an enumeration of these difficulties as described by Chesterton in various books.

1. One of the very first difficulties confronting democracy is the necessity of democratic conviction to begin with: "The difficulty of believing in democracy is that it is so hard to believe - like God and most other good things."(59) How easy it is for the spirit of democracy to fade away, especially when it is based on mood or emotion instead of on the solid basis of dogma, is exemplified by Chesterton in old and new poets. Whitman was democratic in the tone of his verse. On the other hand: "When a modern poet, imitating the free verse of Whitman . . . describes a crowd, it is always to describe his disgust with the crowd."(60)

2. A second difficulty Chesterton expresses as follows: "The danger of democracy is not anarchy; on the contrary, it is monotony."(61) This we find in his comments on America. His idea is that Americans do value the individual,

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(58) G. K. CHESTERTON, Come to Think of it, p. 260.

(59) IDEM, Divorce vs. Democracy, p. 5.

(60) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 203.

(61) IDEM, What I Saw in America, p. 292.

but that where men are trying to compete they are trying to copy and they become featureless by featuring the same thing. Something of the same idea has recently been expressed in one of the annual messages of the U. S. bishops.

3. The third fault of democracy as practiced was no doubt singled out for criticism by Chesterton because of his hatred for the "noble experiment" going on in America - the Prohibition Law. He warns against the general trend to the Puritanical idea of directly forbidding many things.(62)

> The resolution to cure all the ills that flesh is heir to, combined with the guesswork about all possible ills that flesh and nerve and brain-cell may be heir to - these two things conducted simultaneously must inevitably spread a sort of panic of prohibition.(63)

4. Another danger Chesterton thinks he sees is the danger of feminism. He asserts the tyranny of women in American society and says the same danger lies in wait for politics in the democracy.(64)

5. There is an added danger of the denial of liberty in small things even though the larger liberties are loudly proclaimed or demanded. For instance, there is much shouting about freedom of education. "But if I say that one workman is capable of deciding about the education of one child,

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(62) G. K. CHESTERTON, What I Saw in America, pp. 176-177.

(63) IDEM, Fancies vs. Fads, p. 78.

(64) See note 62 above.

that he has the right to select a certain school or resist a certain system, I shall have all those progressive papers roaring at me as a rotten reactionary."(65) Chesterton is astonished at the inconsistency of their stand: "Why the workman would be clever enough to vote a curriculum for everybody else's children, but not clever enough to choose one for his own children, I cannot for the life of me imagine."(66) He makes an excellent comparison: " . . . it was regarded as a simple thing that all the meadows should belong to all the men but a frantic and fantastic thing that any man should own any meadow."(67)

6. Sixthly, it is true that democracy means the power to choose; but in order to choose there must be, in the first place, the possibility of a choice, a real choice. But it may happen eventually that " . . . the democracy has a right to answer questions, but it has no right to ask them."(68) Those who are in political power will offer alternatives to the voting populace, but these alternatives will in reality be two courses of action both favorable to the powerful: "The lord will take two things so much alike

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(65) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Is Grist, p. 170.

(66) Ibid.

(67) Ibid., p. 171.

(68) IDEM, A Miscellany of Men, pp. 59-60.

that he would not mind choosing from them blindfolded - and then for a great jest he will allow the slaves to choose."(69)

7. The danger that confronts democracy in an industrial society is that industrialism accomplishes its ends by indirection and so we find that: "Democracy, an ideal which is simple to excess, was vainly applied to a society which was complex to the point of craziness."(70)

8. Another danger is the natural growth that has expanded the democratic society far beyond what the first promoters of democracy ever had in mind: "They certainly had no conception of the colossal and complicated thing that we now mean by a city." Therefore, those who developed the democratic doctrines " . . . did not intend it for anything at all resembling the modern world . . . . "(71) Despotism may result from democracy grown too large:

> Democracy is never quite democratic except when it is quite direct; and it is never quite direct except when it is quite small. So soon as a mob has grown large enough to have delegates it has grown large enough to have despots; indeed the despots are often the more representative of the two.(72)

9. Another danger is that "the mob is the only permanent and unassailable high priest. Democracy drives its

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(69) G. K. CHESTERTON, A Miscellany of Men, p. 60.

(70) IDEM, All I Survey, p. 142.

(71) IDEM, The Glass Walking-Stick, p. 122.

(72) IDEM, The New Jerusalem, p. 133.

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traditions too hard . . . . The decorum of a democracy is far more of a danger than its lawlessness."(73) Chesterton cites Dickens (surely not an impartial witness) as to this danger in America:

> He saw that there was a perilous possibility that republican ideals might be allied to social anarchy good neither for them nor for any other ideals. Republican simplicity, which is difficult, might be quickly turned into Bohemian brutality, which is easy . . . . Insolence might become a tradition. Bad manners might have all the sanctity of good manners.(74)

10. The last danger of practical democratic processes as given by Chesterton is that representative government "is never representative".(75) He says that although most of the talk is about protecting minorities, the real problem is protecting the "impotent and even invisible majority."(76) "If they will find any possible method of protecting the majority, they will have found something practically unknown to the modern world."(77) Chesterton worked for a Liberal newspaper which "identified political liberty . . . with representative government."(78) Gradually, he says, "I became quite con-

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(73) G. K. CHESTERTON, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 85.

(74) Ibid., p. 82.

(75) IDEM, Charles Dickens, The Last of the Great Men, p. 160.

(76) IDEM, The New Jerusalem, p. 136.

(77) Ibid., p. 135.

(78) IDEM, The Well and the Shallows, p. 60.

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vinced of two facts. First, that representative government had ceased to be representative. Second, that Parliament was in fact gravely menaced by political corruption. Politicians did not represent the populace, even the most noisy and vulgar of the populace . . . . If they represented anything, it was vested interests . . ... "(79) The despotism of which we have spoken before is the result:

> It is an English misfortune that what is called "public spirit" is so often a very private spirit; the legitimate but strictly individual ideals of this or that person who happens to have the power to carry them out. When these private principles are held by very rich people, the result is often the blackest and most repulsive kind of despotism, which is benevolent despotism.(80)

This benevolent despotism proceeds to tell the ordinary man how to run his affairs.

> Now in these primary things in which the old religion trusted a man, the new philosophy utterly distrusts a man. It insists that he must be a very rare sort of man to have any rights in these matters; and when he is the rare sort, he has the right to rule others even more than himself. It is this profound scepticism about the common man that is the common point in the most contradictory elements of modern thought.(81)

Those in power, not trusting the ordinary man to be able properly to run his home or teach his children, surely do

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(79) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Well and the Shallows, p. 60.

(80) IDEM, Alarms and Discursions, p. 167.

(81) IDEM, The Outline of Sanity, p. 228.

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not want him to be in ruling position in the government.

> They do not really want to give him any political power. They are willing to give him a vote, because they have long discovered that it need not give him any power. They are not willing to give him a house, or a wife, or a child, or a dog, or a cow, or a piece of land, because these things really do give him power.(82)

As a result of all these dangers, difficulties, and faults of democracy in practice, Chesterton draws a sad conclusion: "We may say, with some truth, that Democracy has failed; but we shall only mean that Democracy has failed to exist."(83) He is convinced that this is the case in England where "Parliament had come to mean only a secret government by the rich."(84) But it is equally true of America:

> To say that America is more democratic lets loose a wild confusion of tongues. For democracy, strictly speaking, does not mean ease or equality or comradeship among the people. It means direct government by the people . . . . What exists in America is not democracy, which may or may not be possible. It is equality, which was always supposed to be much more impossible. It is not impossible. As an atmosphere, but an actual atmosphere, the sense of social equality . . . does exist in America, as it does not exist in Europe. It is not an impossibility; it is not a possibility; it is a positive fact.(85)

He eulogizes this spirit of America as "a memory of

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(82) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Outline of Sanity, p. 229.

(83) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 216.

(84) Ibid., p. 217.

(85) IDEM, Sidelights on New London and Newer York, pp. 135-136.

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brotherhood, an assumption of manhood, a sort of good and golden simplicity and spontaneity that recalls even yet the ancient visions of Atlantis as a sort of Utopia and the hope that filled the founding of the Western republics. . . ."(86)

Even though democracy has its faults in practice, the doctrine of human equality remains untarnished because it rests on the fundamental truth that "there is no man really clever who has not found that he is stupid. That there is no big man who has not felt small."(87) And the theory behind democracy still rings true. It is wrong to argue against democracy because you say most people are stupid:

> It is stupid to say that "most people" are stupid. It is like saying "most people are tall", when it is obvious that "tall" can only mean taller than most people. It is absurd to denounce the majority of mankind as below the average of mankind.(88)

Democracy is a glorious thing because "democracies make great men."(89) The reason that democracy has this effect is because "it believed that men were great . . . . And by encouraging the greatness in everybody, it naturally encouraged superlative greatness in some."(90)

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(86) G. K. CHESTERTON, Sidelights on New London and Newer York, p. 143.

(87) IDEM, A Miscellany of Men, p. 313.

(88) IDEM, Alarms and Discursions, p. 63.

(89) IDEM, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, p. 9.

(90) Ibid., p. 8.

So the struggle to preserve democracy or revivify it must go on:

> The end of that struggle is not yet; but if the bank is stronger than the sword or the sceptre of popular sovereignty, the end will be the end of democracy. It will have to choose between accepting an acknowledged dictator and accepting dictation which it dare not acknowledge. The process will have begun by giving power to people and refusing to give them their titles; and it will have ended by giving the power to people who refuse to give us their names.(91)

The man who possesses the virtue of wonder, in the face of his religious awe before man as man, must feel impelled to resist the anonymous tyranny and to strike out for the rights of men.

Chesterton, in a powerful poem, calls for the overthrow of the plutocrats and the reinstatement of true democracy:

> They have given us into the hands of new unhappy lords,
> Lords without anger and honour, who dare not carry their swords,
> They fight by shuffling papers; they have bright dead alien eyes;
> They look at our labour and laughter as a tired man looks at flies.
> And the load of their loveless pity is worse than the ancient wrongs,
> Their doors are shut in the evening; and they know no songs.
> We hear men speaking for us of new laws strong and sweet,
> Yet there is no man speaketh as we speak in the street.
> . . . . . .
> But we are the people of England; and we have not spoken yet.
> Smile at us, pay us, pass us. But do not quite forget.(92)

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(91) G. K. CHESTERTON, What I Saw in America, p. 76.

(92) IDEM, The Secret People, in The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, p. 166.

CHAPTER SIX

THE EFFECTS OF WONDER III - VALOR

FOURTH EFFECT - VALOR

The man of wonder looks about him and sees that things are good. He has the love of things. He appreciates the value of every creature made by God. We use the word "valor" here not only because "Valour means valeur; it means a value; courage is itself a solid good; it is an ultimate virtue; valour is in itself valid";(1) but also because of the fact that it means the willingness to fight for what we consider to be of value. This valor or willingness to fight, this chivalry or intrepidity, then, is the fourth effect of the virtue of wonder.

> You cannot love a thing without wanting to fight for it. You cannot fight without something to fight for. To love a thing without wishing to fight for it is not love at all; it is lust. It may be an airy, philosophical, and disinterested lust; it may be, so to speak, a virgin lust; but it is lust, because it is wholly self-indulgent and invites no attack. On the other hand, fighting for a thing without loving it is not even fighting; it can only be called a kind of horse-play that is occasionally fatal. Wherever human nature is human and unspoilt by any special sophistry, there exists this natural kinship between war and wooing, and that natural kinship is called romance. It comes upon a man especially in the great hour of youth; and every man who has ever been young at all has felt, if only for a moment, this ultimate and poetic paradox. He knows that loving the world is the same thing as fighting the

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, George Bernard Shaw, p. 204.

> world. It was at the very moment when he offered to like everybody he also offered to hit everybody. To almost every man that can be called a man this especial moment of the romantic culmination has come.(2)

Civilization does not mean the diminution of this fighting spirit, but rather its augmentation:

> And there is this real moral in the matter; that we have to remember that civilization as it goes on ought not perhaps to grow more fighting - but ought to grow more ready to fight. The more valuable and reposeful is the order we have to guard, the more vivid should be our ultimate sense of vigilance and potential violence.(3)

Now there is this difficulty with our premise of basing this willingness to fight on the love of things. One of the creatures that God made is man, and it is man that we must fight in order to implement in practice this love of things. How does Chesterton answer this objection? He has one of his fictional characters give us the answer - or at least the direction of the answer:

> "There may be people to whom it's senseless to talk about a flower of chivalry; it sounds like a blossom of butchery. But <u>if</u> we want the flower of chivalry, we must go right away back to the root of chivalry. We must go back if we find it in a thorny place called theology."(4)

This theology is the theology behind much of what we have treated with regard to the spirit of brotherhood in

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(2) G. K. CHESTERTON, <u>Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens</u>, p. 28.

(3) IDEM, <u>Alarms and Discursions</u>, p. 91.

(4) IDEM, <u>The Return of Don Quixote</u>, p. 296.

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the light of Chesterton's works. In connection with the effect of valor, he summarizes it in one sentence: "It is not flippancy, it is a very sacred truth, to say that when men really understand that they are brothers they instantly begin to fight."(5)

This demands some explanation, and perhaps at least a partial explanation is found in Chesterton's remarks on Ruskin:

> We disagree with Ruskin as we disagree with a friend gone wrong; with a man who ought to understand but will not. For the irritation against an enemy is a sudden and exceptional passion; but the irritation against a friend is a thing that grows and bears fruit like a living orchard. It is possible to be content with our enemies; it is not possible to be content with our friends. Our irritation against a friend always arises, I think, from the good that he has suggested and has not fulfilled; and this is exactly the feeling which a modern man has about Ruskin.(6)

Another clue as to Chesterton's meaning is his general hatred of snobbery. The snob will not condescend to argue with someone he consideres his inferior. When there is a Christian brotherly spirit, there is then enough humility present for a contest. It is, therefore, the recognition of human dignity which underlies the Christian fighting spirit. "When people begin to ignore human dignity, it will not be long before they begin to ignore human rights."(7)

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(5) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Utopia of Usurers, p. 104.

(6) IDEM, A Handful of Authors, p. 149.

(7) IDEM, All Is Grist, p. 167.

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This is the reason that Chesterton was so opposed to the so-called "realism" in modern literature:

> The man who has exhibited himself - as in so much of modern prose and verse - in every attitude of abject and dishonourable ignominy will find it much harder to spring up straight of a sudden and defend his honour, if his real intellectual and spiritual honour is attacked.(8)

We shall not fight for the oppressed, we shall not accomplish anything in the way of reform if we are not deeply motivated by the conviction of human dignity:

> If we are to save the oppressed we must have two apparently antagonistic emotions in us at the same time. We must think the oppressed man intensely miserable, and, at the same time, intensely attractive and important. We must insist with violence upon his degredation; we must insist with the same violence upon his dignity. For if we relax by one inch the one assertion, men will say he does not need saving. And if we relax by one inch the other assertion, men will say he is not worth saving. The optimists will say that reform is needless. The pessimists will say that reform is hopeless. We must apply both simultaneously to the same oppressed man; we must say that he is a worm and a god; and we must thus lay ourselves open to the accusation (or the compliment) of transcendentalism. This is, indeed, the strongest argument for the religious conception of life. If the dignity of man is an earthly dignity we shall be tempted to deny his earthly degredation. If it is a heavenly dignity we can admit the earthly degredation with all the candour of a Zola. If we are idealists about the other world we can be realists about this world.(9)

Chesterton continues with his discussion of reform by dividing reformers into two classes, the pessimistic and

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(8) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Is Grist, p. 168.

(9) IDEM, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, p. 194.

the optimistic reformers. The pessimists stress how bad man is under bad conditions, the optimists stress how good man is under bad conditions. The optimists, according to Chesterton, are the ones who are much more successful in effecting reforms. The reason these are most triumphant is because they keep alive in the soul "an invincible sense of the thing being worth doing, of the war being worth winning, of the people being worth their deliverance."(10) The reasoning behind the attitude of the optimistic reformer is based on the correct theological viewppint on man:

> His triumph is a religious triumph; it rests upon his perpetual assertion of the value of the human soul and of human daily life. It rests upon the assertion that human life is enjoyable because it is human.(11)

The pessimists have only the weakness of pity on which to base their fight for reform. This pity Chesterton calls "entirely useless for all ends of social reform. Democracy swept Europe with the sabre when it was founded upon the Rights of Man. It has done literally nothing at all since it has been founded only upon the wrongs of man."(12) He blames this attitude of pity without real respect on the teaching of evolution, of which we shall have more to say

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(10) G. K. CHESTERTON, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, pp. 195-196.

(11) Ibid., p. 196.

(12) Ibid., p. 197.

when we speak of the enemies of wonder.

The fighting man, then, is a man of principle, "a fighter for a creed; but indeed there is no other kind of fighter."(13) A sceptic cannot be a fighter.

> He has no loyalty; therefore he can never be really a revolutionist. And the fact that he doubts everything really gets in his way when he wants to denounce anything. For all denunciation implies a moral doctrine of some kind; and the modern revolutionist doubts not only the institution he denounces, but the doctrine by which he denounces it.(14)

Since there is no fighter except for a creed, "I should say that there ought to be no war except religious war."(15) This statement will obviously shock many, but:

> If war is irreligious, it is immoral. No man ought ever to fight at all unless he is prepared to put his quarrel before that invisible Court of Arbitration with which all religion is concerned. Unless he thinks he is vitally, eternally, cosmically in the right, he is wrong to fire off a pocket-pistol. If he does think he is in the right, he is surely justified in praying that the right may prevail.(16)

H. G. Wells, one of Chesterton's "heretics", opposed wars between great powers, but said that it might be necessary sometimes to force small backward peoples to open up resources to the progressing world. He was, therefore,

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(13) G. K. CHESTERTON, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 170.

(14) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 73.

(15) IDEM, The Glass Walking-Stick, p. 72.

(16) Ibid.

against "the only sort of war that I really defend, a war of civilizations and religions, to determine the moral destiny of mankind."(17)

Chesterton defended World War I against those who felt these men died in vain; he said they died to prevent domination by Berlin and this was accomplished. If it were to be taken, however, as a "war to end war", this he would reject: "I am far from certain that, even if anybody could prevent all protest or defiance under arms, offered by anybody anywhere under any provocation, it would not be an exceedingly wicked thing to do."(18)

Just as he defended a war against another nation on such grounds, he also defended the right to revolt for good reason:

> Just as civilization is guarded by potential war, so it is guarded by potential revolution. We ought never to indulge in either without extreme provocation; but we ought to be cured for ever of the fancy that extreme provocation is impossible. Against the tyrant within, as against the barbarian without, every voter should be a potential volunteer.(19)

Chesterton considered this Christian military spirit of which we have been speaking as nobly exemplified in the medieval system of chivalry:

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(17) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, p. 230.

(18) Ibid., p. 255.

(19) IDEM, Fancies Versus Fads, p. 177.

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> Chivalry might be called the baptism of Feudalism. It was an attempt to bring the justice and even the logic of the Catholic creed into a military system which already existed; to turn its discipline into an initiation and its inequalities into a hierarchy.(20)

Another explanation he gives of chivalry and its code is that it is a reaction to the Moslem Oriental attitude to women.(21)

If the Christian military spirit was exemplified by the medieval system of chivalry, it is symbolized by the medieval Gothic architecture:

> It is the only fighting architecture. All its spires are spears at rest; and all its stones are stones asleep in a catapult. In that instant of illusion, I could hear the arches clash like swords as they crossed each other. The mighty and numberless columns seemed to go swinging by like the huge feet of imperial elephants. The graven foliage wreathed and blew like banners going into battle; the silence was deafening with all the mingled noises of a military march; the great bell shook down, as the organ shook up its thunder. The thirsty-throated gargoyles shouted like trumpets from all the roofs and pinnacles as they passed; and from the lectern . . . . of the cathedral the eagle of the awful evangelist clashed his wings of brass.
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> And amid all the noises I seemed to hear the voice of a man shouting in the midst like one ordering regiments hither and thither in the fight; the voice of the great half-military master builder; the architect of spears. I could almost fancy he wore armour while he made that church; and I knew indeed that, under a scriptural figure, he had borne in either hand the trowel and the sword.(22)

Wonder with its enthusiasm and love of things gives

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(20) G. K. CHESTERTON, A Short History of England, pp. 67-68.

(21) Ibid., p. 68.

(22) IDEM, A Miscellany of Men, pp. 250-251.

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birth to the fighting spirit; and what is to be the objective of any fighting that may result?

> The object of all war is peace; but the object of religious war is mental as well as material peace; it is agreement. In short, religious war aims relatively at superiority. Conversion is the one sort of conquest in which the conquered must rejoice.(23)

We have discussed the problem involved in the seeming conflict between respect for human dignity and the willingness to fight those who possess this human dignity. We have drawn the conclusion with Chesterton that:

> It is true that there is not, as pacifists and prigs imagine, the least inconsistency between loving men and fighting them, if we fight them fairly and for a good cause.(24)

This still leaves the problem of respect for our human dignity and our willingness to offer our own life in battle. This is answered by Chesterton in these words: "Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die."(25) He calls this "the paradox of courage; the fact that the way to avoid death is not to have too much aversion for it."(26)

He gives us a couple of examples of what he means.

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(23) G. K. CHESTERTON, The New Jerusalem, p. 221.

(24) IDEM, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 48.

(25) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 170.

(26) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, p. 84.

> Whoever is careless enough of his bones to climb some hopeless cliff above the tide may save his bones by that carelessness. Whoever will lose his life, the same shall save it; an entirely practical and prosaic statement.(27)

The other example is more apropos to our subject here:

> A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine.(28)

Here we see the difference between the suicide and the hero, "between him who dies for the sake of living and him who dies for the sake of dying."(29) It is the difference between "Christian courage, which is a disdain of death" and "Chinese courage, which is a disdain of life."(30) Thus we see the supreme effect of the wonder at man: "Perhaps one never knows what being a man means until the instant of death. Perhaps in a very manly and even military sense all life is a learning to die."(31)

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(27) G. K. CHESTERTON, Tremendous Trifles, p. 84.

(28) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 171.

(29) Ibid.

(30) Ibid.

(31) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 222.

Certainly there is a complete rejection of the cynical attitude of the modern pessimist that "courage is only a form of stupidity."(32) The refutation is simple. He names some great intellectuals who have been courageous and have accepted death bravely: Socrates, St. Thomas More, St. Paul, Boethius, etc.(33)

The heroism of the early Christian martyrs was surely not mistaken for stupidity by the pagan world; for the pagans were converted to Christianity by this indication of the divinity of Christianity. Chesterton explains why:

> Pagans were not impressed by the torture of Christians merely because it showed that they honestly held their opinion; they knew that millions of people honestly held all sorts of opinions. The point of such extreme martyrdom is much more subtle. It is that it gives an appearance of a man having something quite specially strong to back him up, of his drawing upon some power. And this can only be proved when all his physical contentment is destroyed; when all the current of his bodily being is reversed and turned to pain. If a man is seen to be roaring with laughter all the time that he is skinned alive, it would not be unreasonable to deduce that somewhere in the recesses of his mind he had thought of a rather good joke. Similarly, if men smiled and sang (as they did) while they were being boiled or torn to pieces, the spectators felt the presence of something more than mere mental honesty: they felt the presence of some new and unintelligible kind of pleasure, which, presumably, came from somewhere. It might be a strength of madness, or a lying spirit from Hell; but it was something quite positive and extraordinary; as positive as brandy and as extraordinary as conjuring. The Pagan says to himself: 'If

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(32) G. K. CHESTERTON, All I Survey, p. 277.

(33) Ibid., p. 278.

> Christianity makes a man happy while his legs are being eaten by a lion, might it not make me happy while my legs are still attached to me and walking down the street? The Secularists laboriously explain that martyrdoms do not prove a faith to be true, as if anybody was ever such a fool as to suppose that they did. What they did prove, or, rather, strongly suggest, was that something had entered human psychology which was stronger than strong pain.(34)

We see how closely connected is this spirit of valor, therefore, with the joy which we have mentioned as another effect of wonder. Chesterton mentions this connection:

> There is a very natural explanation of this frightful felicity, either of phrase or action, which so many men have exhibited on so many scaffolds or battlefields. It is merely that when a man has found something which he prefers to life, he then for the first time begins to live.(35)

This joy is not only an accompaniment of the threat of death to the prospective martyr, but arises in the heart of the valorous man even at the rising suspicion of the necessity of drastic action for some good cause. Thus in the case of Newman:

> This man, when he was in the sweet but too refined atmosphere of the Oxford High Churchmen, had shed too many tears. But, like all brave men, when he first saw the face of battle, he began to laugh.(36)

We would fail to catch completely the spirit of Chesterton if we were not to show how he associated this fighting spirit with the part of wonder called childlikeness.

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(34) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Things Considered, pp. 83-84.

(35) IDEM, Lunacy and Letters, p. 146.

(36) IDEM, A Handful of Authors, p. 133.

In talking about boyhood, he says: "I have found that by some primodial law they all tend . . . to suddenly attacking each other and equally desisting from the attack."(37) This enjoyment of fighting was also present vicariously to the boy Chesterton through his reading. When he read such things in the books of Robert Louis Stevenson, he "was not horrified by what are called the horrors."(38) The reason was "that a child is not wicked enough to disapprove of war."(39) In one of his novels Chesterton has some aristocrat talking about being too proud to fight.

> "Yes," replied the old statesman. "It is the humble who fight."
>
> "I am not sure that I quite follow your meaning," said Lord Seawood.
>
> "I mean I am too wicked to fight," said Lord Eden. "It is the innocent who kill and burn and break the peace. It is the children who rush and smash and knock each other about and of such is the kingdom of heaven."(40)

This is the militant soul of Chesterton, child of wonder.

In the light of all the foregoing, it seems almost incredible that one of the commentators on Chesterton should formulate the following diagnosis:

> Pacifism was, we believe, the logical outcome of both his politics and his patriotism; and it was

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(37) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, p. 54.

(38) IDEM, Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 84.

(39) Ibid., p. 85.

(40) IDEM, The Return of Don Quixote, p. 259.

> more than that: it was the natural consummation of his ethics. In pacifism not only his reason but his imagination might have been satisfied, his activity have been totally suffused by his religion.(41)

Probably the only pacifistic-sounding phrase we can find in Chesterton's works is a remark by one of his fictional characters: "'Always remember your kind of sword is stronger if one holds it by the wrong end.'"(42) But we must remember that he is talking about The Sword of Wood. Father O'Connor well says: "He was never what is called a Pacificist, though always a man of peace . . . . "(43)

Chesterton derided pacifism:

> It is the notion that not fighting, as such, would prevent somebody else from fighting, or from taking all he wanted without fighting. It assumes that every pacifist is some strange sort of blend of lion-tamer and a mesmerist, who would hold up the invading armies with his glittering eye . . . . (44)

He admits there was some sense to the views of those who stood for the foremost importance of the inner life regardless of outward circumstances; worthy of respect also was the standpoint of those who would leave things to a Higher Court. But these were not the types that represented modern pacifism, for "neither of these two types was ever such a

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(41) F. A. LEA, The Wild Knight of Battersea, p. 84.

(42) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Sword of Wood, p. 7.

(43) John O'CONNOR, Father Brown on Chesterton, p. 106.

(44) G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, p. 20.

fool as to say that he could not be beggared or enslaved, merely because he stood stock still like a post and did not resist beggary or enslavement."(45)

Chesterton's whole attitude on these matters is summed up in this sentence: "While a good peace is better than a good war, even a good war is better than a bad peace."(46)

Is there any hope of this "good peace"? Does Chesterton have any suggestion as to how peace could be attained in our time? Yes, he has; and he proposes that "some use might be made of a central group which contains men of all countries, but men having also the quite unique advantage of a common code of law and justice, and the protection of a sort of permanent courtesy, more deeply founded than the fiction of diplomacy, which is called the profession of Christian charity, and forbids them, at least beyond a certain point, to despise or insult or wantonly exasperate each other."(47) There is hope here because "all these men who disagree in politics agreed in religion. It was impossible not to fancy that some sort of political agreement might best begin here, where there was at least an agreement upon something."(48)

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(45) G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, p. 21.

(46) IDEM, The Everlasting Man, p. 245.

(47) IDEM, Christendom in Dublin, p. 45.

(48) Ibid., p. 47.

How is the atmosphere going to arise in which such beginnings may be possible?

> I see no prospect of any such positive nucleus of amity except in some positive enthusiasm for something that moves the deepest parts of man's moral nature; something which can unite us not (as the prigs say) by being entirely international, but by being universally human. Men cannot agree about nothing any more than they can disagree about nothing. And anything wide enough to make such an agreement must itself be wider than the world.(49)

Chesterton was a true lover of peace. He warned that: "International peace means a peace between nations, not a peace after the destruction of nations, like the Buddhist peace after the destruction of personality."(50) He first said, too, (and others have stolen the credit) that: "The last war brought back body-armour; the next war may bring back bows and arrows."(51) The prophet spoke.

The spirit of prophecy seems to hover over a number of passages he wrote - passages which fit so well into the climate of modern times that they could have been written yesterday in some speech by a statesman discussing the present perilous state of affairs. He might have been describing himself when he wrote of Stevenson:

> "It may be complained that I have represented Stevenson as reacting against the decadence before it existed. And I answer that this is the only real

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(49) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Thing, p. 248.

(50) IDEM, All Things Considered, p. 55.

(51) IDEM, What I Saw in America, p. 85.

way in which a fighting man ever does successfully attack a movement; when he attacks later, he attacks too late.(52)

He hated the thought of living in peace under a constant fear of catastrophe:

To remain at peace, out of sheer panic about a professor with a death-ray or a tyrant with an instrument of torture, would be indeed to die daily and even then not be secure against death.(53)

The conclusion that he draws is that:

We hold that occasion may arise when it is better for a man to fight than to surrender. War is, in the main, a dirty, mean, inglorious business, but it is not the direst calamity that can befall a people. There is one worse state, at least; the state of slavery.

While the possibility of slavery remains, while it merges daily into imminent probability, it is more important to teach men the value of manhood than to preach the softer virtues of peace.(54)

What would he say today about what is called "brinksmanship"?

It is an assumption to suppose that statesmen or national leaders <u>are</u> necessarily wrong even when they do risk great catastrophes, for the sake of creating or preserving some cultural system associated with all that makes life worth living. A man might admit that his efforts to avert catastrophe might fail, that the catastrophe might follow, and still maintain his course, being resolved at least to avoid the worst catastrophe of the loss of the main hope of humanity. Certainly every reform or reconstruction in human history has

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(52) G. K. CHESTERTON, <u>Robert Louis Stevenson</u>, pp. 187-188.

(53) IDEM, <u>The End of the Armistice</u>, p. 200.

(54) <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 202-203.

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been followed by calamities, if wars are the chief calamities.(55)

Chesterton sums up the matter of war and fighting by enunciating these principles:

> These principles are: first, that it may be our main business to do the right thing, even when we detest doing it; second, that the right thing may involve punishing some person, especially some powerful person; third, that the just process of punishment may take the form of fighting and killing. The modern critic is prejudiced against the first principle and calls it asceticism; he is prejudiced against the second principle and calls it vindictiveness; he is prejudiced against the third and generally calls it militarism. That it actually might be the duty of a young man to risk his own life, much against his own inclination, by drawing a sword and killing a tyrant, that is an idea instinctively avoided by this particular mood of modern times. That is why tyrants have such a good time in modern times. And in order to avoid this plain and obvious meaning, of war as a duty and peace as a temptation, the critic has to turn the whole play upside down, and seek its meaning in modern notions so remote as to be in this connection meaningless.(56)

The play he is speaking of is Hamlet. Critics tried to explain in psychoanalytic terms the conflict between Hamlet's concept of his duty and his unwillingness to fulfill it. This is what he means by the critics turning the play upside down.

> The sort of duty that Hamlet shirked is exactly the sort of duty that we are all shirking; that of dethroning justice and vindicating truth. Many are now in a mood to deny that it is a duty because it is a danger. This applies, of course, not only to international but internal and especially industrial

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(55) G. K. CHESTERTON, All I Survey, pp. 34-35.

(56) IDEM, Fancies Versus Fads, p. 37.

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> matters. Capitalism was allowed to grow into a towering tyranny in England because the English were always putting off their popular revolution, just as the Prince of Denmark put off his palace revolution. They lectured the French about their love of bloody revolutions, exactly as they are now lecturing the French about their love of bloody wars. But the patience which suffered England to be turned into a plutocracy was not the patience of the saints; it was that patience which paralyzed the noble prince of the tragedy; accidia and the great refusal.(57)

We can see that the "accidia" ("acedia"), the "sloth" or weariness of which he speaks is an enemy of that element of wonder that we have labeled "enthusiasm", as well as a vice destructive of the valor or fighting spirit of the man of wonder.

We have thus far discussed in detail Chesterton's opinions on the matter of war and fighting. In his St. Thomas Aquinas he refers to a statement attributed to St. Louis, the king of France, to the effect that you must either argue with an infidel as a philosopher or "'thrust a sword through his body as far as it will go!'".(58) The latter method of disposing of controversial matters we have examined; let us say a few words now about what Chesterton thinks about less violent ways of settling things.

One of the characters in the play Magic voices his dislike of acrimonious contention: "'I object to a quarrel because it always interrupts an argument'".(59)

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(57) G. K. CHESTERTON, Fancies Versus Fads, pp. 40-41.

(58) IDEM, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 111.

(59) IDEM, Magic, pp. 52-53. (See Autobiography, p. 200.)

A debate with anyone anywhere on any subject was one of his favorite pastimes. Women might object at the waste of time. They do not understand. "They will raise against an argument . . . the ridiculous objection that nobody is convinced by it; as if a man wanted to make a body-slave of anybody with whom he had played single-stick."(60)

This attitude enabled him to relish much more than the ordinary person his verbal altercations with the enemies of his convictions. This attitude cannot be fully understood, indeed, unless one understands Chesterton's whole philosophy on the problem of evil. This matter will be explained later.

Chesterton has definite methods which he believes should be followed in argumentation. First of all, he believes in fairness to an opponent; his viewpoint should be fairly presented:

> There is one little habit of some of the most intelligent modern writers against which I should like to protest. It consists of flatly refusing to state somebody else's opinion as it stands; and consider it on its own merits. The modern writer must always assume that it is a choice between his own extreme opinion and something at the other extreme.(61)

He points to the example of St. Thomas Aquinas in this:

> After the great example of St. Thomas, the principle stands, or ought always to have stood established; that we must either not argue with a man at all, or

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(60) G. K. CHESTERTON, What's Wrong With the World?, p. 162.

(61) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 238.

> we must argue on his grounds and not ours. We may do other things instead of arguing, according to our views of what actions are morally permissible; but if we argue we must argue "on the reasons and statements of the philosophers themselves."(62)

Another point he makes in this regard is that there is to be no manifestation of contempt for the opponent. He talks about St. Thomas "thinking combatively." But

> This, in his case, certainly did not mean bitterly or spitefully or uncharitably; but it did mean combatively. As a matter of fact, it is generally the man who is not ready to argue, who is ready to sneer. That is why, in recent literature, there has been so little argument and so much sneering.(63)

What were the qualities of St. Thomas' argumentation?

> He maintained controversy with an eye on only two qualities; clarity and courtesy. And he maintained these because they were entirely practical qualities; affecting the probabilities of conversion.(64)

He explains why some reformers are not heeded. The case he uses is the case of William Cobbett:

> It is possible to speak much too plainly to be understood. Most men with any convictions in a confused and complicated age have had the almost uncanny sensation of shouting at people that a mad dog is loose or the house is on fire, to be met merely with puzzled and painfully respectful expressions, as if the remark were a learned citation in Greek or Hebrew. For men in such an age are used to long words and cannot understand short ones . . . . He came to the point too quickly; and it deafened them like an explosion and blinded them like a flash of lightning. His rapidity produced all the effect of remoteness. People of this political and literary

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(62) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 110.

(63) Ibid., pp. 148-149.

(64) Ibid., p. 165.

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> sort understood much better the speakers they were used to; or liked much better the speakers they did not understand.(65)

Chesterton gives us St. Thomas as an example of the fighting spirit he admires in argumentation. And despite the lack of success in Cobbett's efforts as described above, he still admires his militant nature and explains it thus:

> He was simply a man who had discovered a crime: ancient like many crimes; concealed like all crimes. He was as one who had found in a dark wood the bones of his mother, and suddenly knew she had been murdered. He knew now that England had been secretly slain. Some, he would say, might think it a matter of mild regret to be expressed in murmurs. But when he found a corpse he gave a shout; and if fools laughed at anyone shouting, he would shout the more, till the world should be shaken with that terrible cry in the night.(66)

It is a picture of Chesterton himself as he fought the corruption in the English government and English society.

The supreme example of the perfect fighting spirit in the cause of all that is good is Christ Himself:

> I looked at the New Testament. There I found an account, not in the least of a person with his hair parted in the middle or his hands clasped in appeal, but of an extraordinary being with lips of thunder and acts of lurid decision, flinging down tables, casting out devils, passing with the wild secrecy of the wind from mountain isolation to a sort of dreadful demagogy; a being who often acted like an angry god - and always like a god. Christ had even a literary style of his own, not to be found, I think, elsewhere; it consists of an almost furious use of the a fortiori. His 'how much more' is piled one

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(65) G. K. CHESTERTON, William Cobbett, pp. 178-179.

(66) Ibid., pp. 176-177.

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upon another like castle upon castle in the clouds. The diction used about Christ has been, and perhaps wisely, sweet and submissive. But the diction used by Christ is quite curiously gigantesque; it is full of camels leaping through needles and mountains hurled into the sea. Morally it is equally terrific; he called himself a sword of slaughter, and told men to buy swords if they sold their coats for them.(67)

In the New Testament the inquirer will

not find a word of all that obvious rhetoric against war which has filled countless books and odes and orations; not a word about the wickedness of war, the wastefulness of war, the appalling scale of the slaughter in war and all the rest of the familiar frenzy; indeed not a word about war at all. There is nothing that throws any particular light on Christ's attitude towards organized warfare, except that he seems to have been rather fond of Roman soldiers.(68)

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(67) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 271-272.

(68) IDEM, The Everlasting Man, p. 231.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MEANS TO WONDER

When we were examining the question of whether wonder is a virtue, one of the reasons given for an affirmative answer to that query was that there was a difficulty connected with maintaining the attitude of wonder past its normal period of existence in the years of our youth.

> Witness, O Sun that blinds our eyes,
> Unthinkable and unthankable King,
> That though all other wonder dies
> I wonder at not wondering.(1)

There is a difficulty. It is expressed by the fictional character in Manalive: "'His creed of wonder was Christian by this absolute test; that he felt it continually slipping from himself as much as from others.'"(2)

When Chesterton spoke of gratitude and humility he alluded to the fact that we go along in the same groove continually day by day, seeing less and less the significance of things, "unless we are continually goading ourselves."(3)

What is the reason for this? "Why was there, as I had already realized that there certainly was, a sort of daily fight to appreciate the daylight; to which we had to summon

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Mystery in The Ballad of St. Barbara, p. 20.

(2) IDEM, Manalive, p. 282.

(3) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, p. 85.

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all imagination and poetry and the labour of the arts to aid us?"(4) The real reason behind this constant threat of darkness and blindness for the mind of man is given by Chesterton in that same context as original sin, the disclosure of which doctrine to the un-Christian mind of the future convert was a revelation confirming what, by a kind of intuition, he already felt must be true.

There must be, therefore, a constant battle to keep alive within ourselves the virtue of wonder. In this chapter we shall see that Chesterton has some definite suggestions to make as to the means to be used to spark and nourish this virtue in our souls.

The means to which we have found reference in the various works of Chesterton are: first of all, leisure, an indispensible condition to begin with; second, the development of the contemplative spirit; thirdly, the development of the imagination or the spirit of romance and adventure in life, especially through art and literature; fourthly, limitation of self or mortification and penance or the consideration in general of the possibility of loss of what we possess; fifthly, the consideration of our exile condition; sixthly, travel as a practical method of gaining in wonder, and lastly, scientific studies.

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(4) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common Man, p. 243.

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Let us take these means one by one and see what Chesterton has to say about them.

I. LEISURE

"The wisdom of a scribe cometh by his time of leisure: and he that is less in action, shall receive wisdom."(5)

The Sacred Scriptures themselves are a proof that Chesterton is correct in his insistence on the necessity of leisure to awaken the spirit of wonder. It is a condition "sine qua non". Chesterton expresses it through a fictional character in a characteristic paradox:

> "There's no time for dreaming in this world," answered the young lady . ... .
> "I have been thinking lately," said Inglewood in a low voice, "that there's no time for waking up."(6)

Chesterton highly recommends this "idleness"; in one of his essays he describes some men he saw near Glasgow:

> Just at the moment when I saw them . . . they were not dancing; nor were they working. They were doing nothing. Which, in my opinion (and I trust yours), was the finest thing they could do.(7)

Not only is it to be recommended, but he makes it even stronger: "Doing nothing is sometimes one of the highest of the duties of man."(8)

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(5) Ecclus. 38, 25.

(6) G. K. CHESTERTON, Manalive, p. 87.

(7) IDEM, A Miscellany of Men, p. 138.

(8) IDEM, Utopia of Usurers, p. 40.

He praises Watts, the artist, for being an example of such idleness:

> He was something which is one of the most powerful and successful things in the world, something which is far more powerful and successful than a legion of students and prizemen: he was a serious and industrious truant.(9)

Chesterton accused himself, we will recall, of having the faults of certain impulses of anger and of idleness. If his idleness produced the vast amount of literary fruit the world stores in its treasury of classics today, we must exclaim, "O felix culpa". Chesterton explains his personal feelings on the matter as follows:

> There are some who complain of a man for doing nothing; there are some, still more mysterious and amazing, who complain of having nothing to do. When actually presented with some beautiful blank hours or days, they will grumble at their blankness. When given the gift of loneliness, which is the gift of liberty, they will cast it away; they will destroy it deliberately with some dreadful game with cards or a little ball. I speak only for myself; I know it takes all sorts to make a world; but I cannot repress a shudder when I see them throwing away their hard-won holidays by doing something. For my own part, I never can get enough Nothing to do. I feel as if I had never had leisure to unpack a tenth part of the luggage of my life and thoughts. I need not say that there is nothing mis-anthropic in my desire for isolation; quite the other way. In my morbid boyhood, as I have said, I was sometimes, in quite a horrible sense, solitary in society. But in my manhood, I have never felt more sociable than I do in solitude.(10)

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(9) G. K. CHESTERTON, G. F. Watts, p. 36.

(10) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 218.

Holidays are a great blessing for mankind. "When you give a man a holiday you give him back his body and soul."(11) Or, to put it another way: "He gets his head back again; that is the germ of the holiday."(12) A holiday "is the restaurant or restoring thing that, by a blast of magic, turns a man into himself."(13) There is in a holiday a foretaste of our eternal reward: "Immortality is the great holiday . . . . "(14)

Americans are to be reprimanded for their lack of appreciation of leisure:

> Americans do not need drink to inspire them to do anything; though they do sometimes, I think, need a little for the deeper and more delicate purpose of teaching them how to do nothing.(15)

So much for Chesterton's appreciation of the gift of leisure time. What about its need for the acquisition of the virtue of wonder? Chesterton specifically mentions this:

> This law of the leisure needed for the awakening of wonder applies, indeed, to things superficially familiar as well as to things superficially fresh. The chief case for old enclosures and boundaries is that they enclose a space in which new things

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(11) G. K. CHESTERTON, Utopia of Usurers, p. 27.

(12) Ibid., p. 28.

(13) Ibid., p. 31.

(14) Ibid., p. 27.

(15) IDEM, Sidelights on New London and Newer York, p. 150.

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> can always be found later, like live fish within the four corners of a net. The chief charm of having a home that is secure is having leisure to feel it as strange.(16)

There are gravely harmful results to the welfare of society arising from the lack of appreciation of leisure:

> The most precious, the most consoling, the most pure and holy, the most noble habit of doing nothing at all - that is being neglected in a degree which seems to me to threaten the degeneration of the whole race. It is because artists do not practice, patrons do not patronize, crowds do not assemble to reverently worship the great work of Doing Nothing, that the world has lost its philosophy and even failed to invent a new religion.(17)

II. DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRIT

The second means to acquire the virtue of wonder is to encourage the growth of the contemplative spirit in the soul. This is the process with which we occupy the leisure time which is the first necessary condition for our task. We must have the solitude in this leisure which is needed for meditative thought. We must then do as Dr. Johnson did:

> He detached himself from time as in an ecstasy of impartiality; and saw the ages with an equal eye. He was not merely alone with God; he even shared the loneliness of God, which is love.(18)

We must at certain times in our life "withdraw into a narrower and narrower world" for the purpose of "acting in a

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(16) G. K. CHESTERTON, Irish Impressions, pp. 23-24.

(17) IDEM, Generally Speaking, p. 112.

(18) IDEM, G. K. C. as M. C., p. 75.

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wider and wider sphere." We must, like a fictional character in a Chesterton novel, have it said of us: "He lived in a small world out of a love of large questions."(19) It is a sign of growth: "In proportion as a thing rises in the scale of things, it tends to localize and even narrow its natural functions."(20)

The statement made about withdrawing into a narrow world to act in a wider sphere is further explained by Chesterton in an essay in which he is discussing the cult or desire of the world for the simple life:

> The simplicity towards which the world is driving is the necessary outcome of all our systems and speculations and of our deep and continuous contemplation of things. For the universe is like everything in it; we have to look at it repeatedly and habitually before we see it. It is only when we have seen it for the hundredth time that we see it for the first time. The more consistently things are contemplated, the more they tend to unify themselves and therefore to simplify themselves. The simplification of anything is always sensational. Thus monotheism is the most sensational of things: it is as if we gazed long at a design full of disconnected objects, and, suddenly, with a stunning thrill, they came together into a huge and staring face.(21)

This simplification or unification of our thought may be a very slow and lengthy process:

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(19) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Return of Don Quixote, p. 179.

(20) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 219.

(21) IDEM, Varied Types, pp. 125-126.

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> For in this world of ours we do not so much go on and discover small things; rather we go on and discover big things. It is the details that we see first; it is the design that we only see very slowly; and some men die never having seen it at all.(22)

In a passage which we shall quote later in connection with relativism, we shall see how it is only the objective contemplative, not the subjectivist, who practices the virtue of wonder.(23)

III. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SPIRIT OF ROMANCE

The third means suggested in the works of Chesterton for developing the habit of wonder is the stimulation of the imagination or the spirit of romance and adventure in life, especially through the arts and literature. Chesterton saw in this purpose the very object or end of the arts:

> The Arts exist, as we should put it in our primeval fashion, to show forth the glory of God; or, to translate the same thing in terms of our psychology, to awaken and keep alive the sense of wonder in man. The success of any work of art is achieved when we say of any subject, a tree or a cloud or a human character, "I have seen that a thousand times and I never saw it before."(24)

Great art means true progress toward a superior civilization:

> In one sense there is a real and actual law of progress by which we grow simpler as we grow more civilized, for the more we scan and study the phenomena around us the more they tend to unify themselves with the power behind them, and the whole of

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(22) G. K. CHESTERTON, William Blake, pp. 196-197.

(23) Cf. IDEM, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 219.

(24) IDEM, The Thing, p. 49.

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existence thus seen for the first time seems something of an entirely new shape and colour, a fresh and surprising thing. And all the great writers of our time represent in one form or another this attempt to re-establish communication with the elemental or, as it is sometimes more roughly and fallaciously expressed, to return to nature.(25)

In Chesterton's writings we find direct reference to these above-mentioned effects as produced by the art works of Giotto and of G. F. Watts.

Of Giotto's works he says this:

The figures are still partly architectural while the faces are alive with portraiture. This first moment of motion has much to do with that sense of morning and youth which so many admirers of mediaevalism have felt, and which I shall continue to feel, with all respect to the mediaevalist sculptor. Nothing is nearer to the nerve of primal wonder, which is the soul of all the arts, than that strange saying of the blind man in the Gospels, that when he was half awakened to sight, he saw 'man as trees walking'. There is something about the figures of Giotto that suggests men as trees walking. The Byzantine School will not permit me to say that before his eyes were thus opened, the artist had been wholly blind. But I will still maintain that there was something like a miracle, in the transition from treating trees as tracery and men as trees, to the realization of the new shock of liberation; and how, at the word of God, they could arise and walk.(26)

With regard to the works of Watts, Chesterton has this comment on their relation to wonder:

What they are can only be described as iridescent. A curious lustre or glitter, conveyed chiefly by a singular and individual brush-work, lies over all

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(25) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common Man, p. 160.

(26) IDEM, in his Foreword to Giotto, the Legend of St. Francis by Edith M. Cowles, p. 12.

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> his great pictures. It is the dawn of things: it is the glow of the primal sense of wonder; it is the sun of the childhood of the world; it is the light that never was on sea or land; but still it is a light shining on things, not shining through them. It is a light which exhibits and does honour to this world, not a light that breaks in upon this world to bring it terror or comfort, like the light that suddenly peers round the corner of some dark Gothic chapel with its green or golden or blood-red eyes.(27)

The same element that he finds in the art of Giotto and Watts, he finds also in the work of Chaucer:

> There is in it some hint of those huge and abysmal ideas of which the poets are half-conscious when they write; the primal and elemental ideas connected with the very nature of creation and reality.(28)

We note the words that Chesterton uses in these skilled analyses of these artists - words like "primeval" "the first time", "something entirely new", "a fresh and surprising thing", "communication with the elemental", "first moment of motion", "that sense of morning and youth", "the nerve of primal wonder", "the dawn of things", "the primal sense of wonder", and the "sun of the childhood of the world".

The sense of wonder, therefore, is related to the sentiments that filled the heart of the first man as he looked out at a fresh creation. It is this wonder that we should share in our inspection of creation; and it is this wonder that we learn by the proper appreciative viewing of great painting and sculpture and the intelligent reading of great

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(27) G. K. CHESTERTON, G. F. Watts, p. 133.

(28) IDEM, Chaucer, p. 19.

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literature.

It is the "creativity" of the geniuses of the artistic and literary worlds to which Chesterton is referring. It is their "creations" at which we open our eyes in wonder. Of Chaucer he says: "The Poet is the Maker; he is the creator of a cosmos; and Chaucer is the creator of the whole world of his creatures. He made the pilgrimage; he made the pilgrims. He made all the tales that are told by the pilgrims."(29)

We have been speaking of the spirit of wonder as rising high in the heart of the man of good taste in art and literature. But there is an earlier beginning for this rise of wonder. There is a training for the young that is possible. Chesterton finds this in fairy tales. There are a number of passages in Chesterton's works which pertain to this topic of fairy tales; and these passages may leave the hasty reader in a kind of haze as to the writer's meaning in being so enthusiastic about these children's tales. It is part of his program of wonder and its encouragement. There is a good explanation in "Orthodoxy":

> This elementary wonder, however, is not a mere fancy derived from the fairy tales; on the contrary, all the fire of the fairy tales is derived from this. Just as we all like love tales because there is an instinct of sex, we all like astonishing tales because they touch the nerve of the ancient instinct of astonishment. This is proved by the fact that

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(29) G. K. CHESTERTON, Chaucer, p. 18.

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> when we are very young children we do not need fairy tales; we only need tales. Mere life is interesting enough. A child of seven is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door and saw a dragon. But a child of three is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door. Boys like romantic tales; but babies like realistic tales - because they find them romantic.(30)

The whole point that Chesterton means to make, therefore, in all his evaluation of the practical value of great art in promoting his favored virtue, is that we are like the seven year old above who needs this stimulation to produce the proper effect in his soul; but Chesterton really wants us to make an effort to become even younger - to become like the three year old who appreciates the ordinary things of life so much that he finds these common things wonderful.

In order to accomplish this great feat of childhood, we must stimulate our creative imagination. We must re-create creation for ourselves for the sake of awakening the primal sense of wonder. In this way our imagination will give us a sane view of things - will help preserve our mental balance throughout life. Chesterton has one of his fictional figures speak as follows on this subject:

> "You once told me you feared for the family sanity, merely because you had bad dreams and brooded over things of your own imagination. Believe me, it's not the imaginative people who become insane. It's not they who are mad, even when they are morbid. They can always be woken up from bad dreams by broader prospects and brighter visions - because

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(30) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 95-96.

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> they are imaginative. The men who go mad are the unimaginative. The stubborn, stoical men who have only room for one idea and take it literally. The sort of man who seems to be silent, but stuffed to bursting, congested . . . . "(31)

His thoughts on this same subject of imagination and a sane view of life are more plainly expressed in Orthodoxy:

> There is a notion adrift everywhere that imagination, especially mystical imagination, is dangerous to man's mental balance. Poets are commonly spoken of as psychologically unreliable; and generally there is a vague association between wreathing laurels in your hair and sticking straws in it. Facts and history utterly contradict this view. Most of the very great poets have been not only sane, but extremely business-like . . . . Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason. Poets do not go mad; but chess-players do. Mathematicians go mad, and cashiers; but creative artists very seldom. I am not . . . in any sense attacking logic: I only say that this danger does lie in logic, not in imagination. Artistic paternity is as wholesome as physical paternity.(32)

Why is it that, according to Chesterton, the logicians and the mathematicians should be the ones in greater danger to the health of their minds?

> Poetry is sane because it floats easily in an infinite sea; reason seeks to cross the infinite sea, and so make it finite. The result is mental exhaustion . . . . To accept everything is an exercise, to understand everything a strain. The poet only desires exaltation and expansion, a world to stretch himself in. The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heaven into his head. And it is his head that splits.(34)

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(31) G. K. CHESTERTON, Four Faultless Felons, p. 83.

(32) IDEM, Orthodoxy, pp. 27-28.

(33) IDEM, Lunacy and Letters, p. 34.

(34) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 29.

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The same thing that happens to the logician happens to the mathematician:

> And in the same way the psychological danger lies in wait for the man who tries to measure all things, for it is that way that madness lies. The brain cracks when the man tries to cram the whole universe inside it and bar the doors, not when man's mind is like some vast and hospitable tree, nested in by birds out of strange countries and swayed by winds out of the ends of heaven."(35)

Another way of explaining why it is that the artists are sane and the mathematicians go mad is this:

> It is the very difference between the artistic mind and the mathematical that the former sees things as they are in a picture, some nearer and larger, some smaller and further away: while to the mathematical mind everything, every unit in a million, every fact in a cosmos, must be of equal value. That is why mathematicians go mad; and poets scarcely ever do.(36)

The above quotations are an indication of the direction of Chesterton's thought which caused the psychiatrist quoted by Maisie Ward to equate sanity with reading Chesterton and which caused his worthy commentator, Cammaerts, to express his personal gratitude to Chesterton for the aid given him by his writings in his own search for a balanced position.

Not only does the imagination help a man to a sane and balanced view of life, but it facilitates a life of virtue:

> "No man has less right to be lawless than a man of imagination. For he has spiritual adventures, and

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(35) G. K. CHESTERTON, Lunacy and Letters, p. 35.

(36) IDEM, G. F. Watts, p. 65.

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can take his holidays when he likes."(37)

It is the lack of imaginative effort that leads men to evil-doing:

> Three-quarters of the real luxury or prodigality or profligacy, that is complained of just now, is due to the dullness of people who cannot imagine anything they do not experience. They are so miserably and dismally stupid that they actually have to do things.(38)

Historical eras of evil can be accounted for by the same bankruptcy of imagination:

> The monstrosity of the crimes of the Renaissance was not a mark of imagination; it was a mark, as all monstrosity is, of the loss of imagination. It is only when a man has really ceased to see a horse as it is, that he invents a centaur, only when he can no longer be surprised at an ox, that he worships the devil.(39)

For all these good reasons, then, Chesterton concludes that imagination is an indispensible requisite to be demanded as an objective of the educational system:

> The most essential educational product is Imagination. It is a wandering and even wild Imagination that all schools should chiefly instruct all school-children. For Imagination will teach them how to live a quiet and humdrum life.
>
> The simple truth is now much neglected both by the fashionable and the old-fashioned. The way to make people contented is to make them creative, not to make them barren.(40)

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(37) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Man Who Knew Too Much, p. 212.

(38) IDEM, Sidelights on New London and Newer York, p. 63.

(39) IDEM, Varied Types, pp. 150-151.

(40) IDEM, Sidelights of New London and Newer York, p. 62.

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For an example of what Chesterton meant by a man of imagination we need search no further than the promoter of wonder himself. Any doubt about his supreme ability as an imaginative artist can be easily dispelled by reading The Wings of Stone, a masterpiece of fanciful writing found in his book of essays called Alarms and Discursions.

We must remember that all this effort to encourage the growth of the imaginative potency in man is for the ultimate purpose of achieving the keener apprehension of the romance and adventure of life that helps in the development of the virtue of wonder. Through the use of our imagination, with the help of classical literature and the great works of art, we attain a higher level of appreciation for the obvious and the ordinary in life with all that this implies in the philosophy of Chesterton.

There is a conversation in one of the detective stories of our author that has as its topic this romance of life:

> "But don't you think," asked the Captain thoughtfully, "that real life sometimes is like a romance?"
>
> "I think," replied Wotton, with a certain genuine shrewdness that lay very deep in him, "that I could always really tell the difference."
>
> "You are right," said Pond; "and it seems to me the difference is this. Life is artistic in parts, but not as a whole; it's like broken bits of different works of art. When everything hangs together, and it all fits in, we doubt."(41)

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(41) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Paradoxes of Mr. Pond, p. 151.

We must live our lives piece by piece. We do not understand how the pieces all fit together, but we are involved in an adventure for that very reason. Chesterton offers as an example of this romantic element in life our very birth into a certain family:

> This is, indeed, the sublime and special romance of the family. It is romantic because it is a toss-up. It is romantic because it is everything that its enemies call it. It is romantic because it is arbitrary. It is romantic because it is there. So long as you have groups of men chosen rationally, you have some special or sectarian atmosphere. It is when you have groups of men chosen irrationally that you have men. The element of adventure begins to exist; for an adventure is, by its nature, a thing that comes to us. It is a thing that chooses us, not a thing that we choose.(42)

He goes on to reject falling in love as the supreme adventure in life, because we have too much to do with this ourselves if it occurs in our lives. What is the supreme adventure, then?

> The supreme adventure is being born. There we do walk suddenly into a splendid and startling trap. There we do see something of which we have not dreamed before. Our father and mother do lie in wait for us, like brigands from a bush. Our uncle is a surprise. Our aunt is, in the beautiful common expression, a bolt from the blue. When we step into the family, by the act of being born, we do step into a world which is incalculable, into a world which has its own strange laws, into a world which could do without us, into a world that we have not made. In other words, when we step into the family we step into a fairy-tale.(43)

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(42) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, pp. 190-191.

(43) Ibid., pp. 191-192.

Life is so interesting because it is a romance. In scientific experimentation and in philosophical deduction we know the ending; in a story we do not. That is what makes it interesting. "But life is always a novel . . . . our existence is still a story."(44)

In one of his broadcasts Chesterton gave another example of what he meant by seeing the wonder and romance in the ordinary events of everyday life:

> Life is far more astonishing than anything that we enjoy or suffer in life. What has really happened during the last seven days and nights? Seven times we have been dissolved into darkness as we shall be dissolved into dust; our very selves, so far as we know, have been wiped out of the world of living things; and seven times we have been raised alive like Lazarus, and found all our limbs and sense unaltered, with the coming of the day. That one simple fact of Sleep is an almost perfect example of the sort of thing I mean.(45)

Finally, as far as examples of the type of man he means when he is thinking of the man of romance and adventure, we have especially Browning and Stevenson.

Of Browning he says: "What he really was was a romantic. He offered the cosmos as an adventure . . . . "(46)

Of Stevenson he writes the following:

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(44) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 193.

(45) IDEM, Seven Days' Hard in An Anthology, selected with an intr. by D. B. Wyndham Lewis, p. 233.

(46) IDEM, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 175.

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> Stevenson gained in that school of boyish bravado his admirable sense of symbolic attitude and action, his deep joy in gay colour and gallant carriage, his fine feeling for life as a story and honour as a fight; his response to the challenge of the open door or the drag of the road over the hill . . . . (47)

IV. LIMITATION

The fourth means to wonder that we are about to treat here is the limitation of self-or mortification and penance-or the consideration in general of the possibility of loss of what we already possess.

There are, therefore, three exercises for us to engage in under this heading of limitation. The first is to understand the contingency of things and the value of limitations; secondly, to realize the possibility of loss of the things we have; and thirdly, to practice limiting ourselves in the manner of penance and mortification.

First of all, most basically, we must come to a realization of the contingency of things in order to approach the wisdom of wonder. This whole idea is at the basis of one of the integral parts of wonder, the position of humility that man must assume in order to view everything from the proper standpoint; because

> Whereas it had been supposed that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by extending our ego to

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(47) G. K. CHESTERTON, Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 156.

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> infinity, the truth is that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by reducing our ego to zero.(48)

The love of things, another integral part of wonder, is also based on this realization of the contingency of things, because:

> Until we realize that things might not be, we cannot realize that things are. Until we see the background of darkness we cannot admire the light as a single and created thing. As soon as we have seen that darkness, all light is lightening, sudden, blinding, and divine.(49)

Let us further approach in some way the understanding of what Chesterton meant by his appreciation of limitation. In one of his novels one of the characters speaks as follows:

> "Have you never looked through an archway?" asked Herne, "and seen the landscape beyond as bright as a lost paradise? That is because there is a frame to the picture . . . You are cut off from something and allowed to look at something. When will people understand that the world is a window and not a blank infinity; a window in a wall of infinite nothing? When I wear this hood I carry my window with me. I say to myself - this is the world that Francis of Assisi saw and loved because it was limited. The hood has the very shape of a Gothic window."(50)

Another fictional character in a different book expatiates on the same subject and names pantheism as the enemy of proper sentiments on this matter:

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(48) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 164.

(49) Ibid., p. 65.

(50) IDEM, The Return of Don Quixote, pp. 171-172.

> "The poet Phineas Salt was a man who had made himself master of everything, in a sort of frenzy of freedom and omnipotence. He had tried to feel everything, experience everything, imagine everything that could be or could not be. And he found, as all such men have found, that that illimitable liberty is itself a limit. It is like the circle, which is at once an eternity and a prison. He not only wanted to do everything. He wanted to be everybody. To the Pantheist God is everybody: to the Christian He is also somebody. But this sort of Pantheist will not narrow himself by a choice. To want everything is to will nothing."(51)

In yet another novel Chesterton connects the idea of limitation with our previously discussed element of romance:

> "Don't you see this prime fact of identity is the limit set on all living things?"
>
> "No," said Phillip, with suppressed but sudden violence. "I deny that any limit is set upon living things."
>
> "Why, then I understand," said Dorian, "why, though you make such good speeches, you have never written any poetry."(52)

Chesterton uses the words "romance" and "poetry" interchangeably. The romantic or adventurous person, whether he writes poetry or not, is called a poet.

We must be limited and not completely at liberty if we are to taste of the romantic spirit. He compares life to a play. There are many parts of this play that we can write for ourselves, but the adventurous element is found in those portions which are written for us by another. The rich have difficulty in living in this romantic atmosphere because

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(51) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Poet and the Lunatics, p. 193. Cf. also p. 51.

(52) IDEM, The Flying Inn, p. 263. Cf. pp. 264-265.

they can write too much of the play themselves.

> The thing which keeps life romantic and full of fiery possibilities is the existence of these great plain limitations which force all of us to meet the things we do not like or do not expect. It is vain for the supercilious moderns to talk of being in uncongenial surroundings. To be in a romance is to be in uncongenial surroundings. To be born into this earth is to be born into uncongenial surroundings, hence to be born into a romance. Of all these great limitations and frameworks which fashion and create the poetry and variety of life, the family is the most definite and important. Hence it is misunderstood by the moderns, who imagine that romance would exist most perfectly in a complete state of what they call liberty . . . . They are seeking under every shape and form a world where there are no limitations - that is, a world where there are no outlines; that is, a world where there are no shapes. There is nothing baser than that infinity. They say they wish to be as strong as the universe, but they really wish the whole universe as weak as themselves.(53)

Examples of circumstances wherein a man could realize the benefits of limitation would be "to be besieged in a city" or "to be snowed up in a street."(54)

The best literary example to help with this realization would be the adventures of Robinson Crusoe, "which owes its eternal vivacity to the fact that it celebrates the poetry of limits, nay, even the wild romance of prudence."(55) We see how Crusoe treasured every bit of salvage from the wrecked ship. We can perform a similar exercise:

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(53) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, pp. 194-195.

(54) Ibid., p. 188.

(55) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 115.

> It is a good exercise, in empty or ugly hours of the day, to look at anything, the coal-scuttle or the bookcase, and think how happy one could be to have brought it out of the sinking ship on to the solitary island.(56)

Chesterton could never sympathize with or participate in the modern surge of revolt against laws or limitations. For instance, he could never rebel against the law of the unity of marriage:

> Keeping to one woman is a small price for so much as seeing one woman. To complain that I could only be married once was like complaining that I had only been born once . . . . A man is a fool who complains that he cannot enter Eden by five gates at once. Polygamy is a lack of realization of sex; it is like a man plucking five pears in mere absence of mind.(57)

In the same way that he treasures one wife, he treasures one universe:

> For the universe is a single jewel, and while it is a natural cant to talk of a jewel as peerless and priceless, of this jewel it is literally true. This cosmos is indeed without peer and without price; for there cannot be another one.(58)

Under this heading of limitation there is a second exercise in which we should engage: that is the realization that it is possible to lose the things we already have. "The way to love anything is to realise that it might be lost."(59)

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(56) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, p. 115.

(57) Ibid., p. 103.

(58) Ibid., pp. 116-117.

(59) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, p. 56.

He suggests a very simple exercise to help us with this:

> This world and all our powers in it are far more awful and beautiful than even we know until some accident reminds us. If you wish to perceive that limitless felicity, limit yourself if only for a moment. If you wish to realise how fearfully and wonderfully God's image is made, stand on one leg. If you want to realise the splendid vision of all visible things - wink the other eye.(60)

This practice helps us attain to the love of things which is requisite for the virtue of wonder:

> For it is the point of all deprivation that it sharpens the idea of value; and, perhaps, this is, after all, the reason of the riddle of death. In a better world, perhaps, we may permanently possess, and permanently be astonished at possession. In some strange estate beyond the stars we may manage at once to have and to enjoy. But in this world, through some sickness at the root of psychology, we have to be reminded that a thing is ours by its power of disappearance.(61)

The possibility of death reminds us of the splendor of life:

> "I caught a glimpse of the meaning of death and all that - the skull and cross-bones, the memento mori. It isn't only meant to remind us of a future life, but to remind us of the present life too. With our weak spirits we should grow old in eternity if we were not kept young by death. Providence has to cut immortality into lengths for us, as nurses cut the bread and butter into fingers."(62)

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(60) G. K. CHESTERTON, Tremendous Trifles, p. 56.

(61) IDEM, Lunacy and Letters, pp. 16-17.

(62) IDEM, Manalive, pp. 226-227.

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We will recall that "Innocent Smith" in Manalive used the threat of death to awaken the pessimistic professor to a love of life and an appreciation of the universe. That class of intellectuals, so-called, is in dire need of such a shock:

> "Until a pistol barrel was poked under their very noses they never even knew they had been born. For ages looking up an eternal perspective it might be true that life is learning to die. But for these little white rats it was just as true that death was their only chance of learning to live."(63)

We now arrive at the third point under this section on limitation. The third exercise to help attain the virtue of wonder is the actual loss, temporary or permanent as the case may be, of something to which we have been accustomed; and this loss here comes about voluntarily, by way of penance or mortification.

> The fact is that this purification and austerity are even more necessary for the appreciation of life and laughter than for anything else. To let no bird fly past unnoticed, to spell patiently the stones and weeds, to have the mind a storehouse of sunset, requires a discipline in pleasure, and an education in gratitude.(64)

It is not the Stoical attitude that he commends here. It must be a Christian asceticism:

> The essential difference between Christian and Pagan asceticism lies in the fact that Paganism in renouncing pleasure, gives up something which it does not think desirable; whereas Christianity in giving up pleasure gives up something which it thinks very

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(63) G. K. CHESTERTON, Manalive, pp. 281-282.

(64) IDEM, Varied Types, p. 150.

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desirable indeed.(65)

In other words the Christian ascetic has "the idea of giving up a thing not because it is bad, but because it is good."(66)

Although Chesterton does not deny other salutary effects resulting from the practice of self-denial, the one he stresses is the attainment of wonder by means of "the vigil of asceticism which ends in the vision of a natural world made new."(67)

Even as the result is a happy one, so, too, the process itself by which this aim is achieved may be something which is not entirely odious. Asceticism of the proper kind does not make men cheerless: "It was the monks who were the spendthrifts of happiness, and we who are its misers."(68) Strange though it may seem at first thought, Chesterton connects the element of childlikeness with the idea of penance:

> This game of self-limitation is one of the secret pleasures of life. As it says in the little manuals about such sports, the game is played in several forms. One very good way of playing it is to look at the nearest bookcase and wonder whether you would find sufficient entertainment in that chance collection, even if you had no other books. But always it is dominated by this principle of division and restriction, which begins with the game played by the child with the paving-stones. But I dwell upon it

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(65) G. K. CHESTERTON, G. F. Watts, pp. 57-58.

(66) IDEM, As I Was Saying, p. 222.

(67) IDEM, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 71.

(68) IDEM, Varied Types, p. 68.

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> here because it must be understood as something real and rooted, so far as I am concerned, in order that the other views I have offered about these things may make any sort of sense. If anybody chooses to say that I have founded all my social philosophy on the antics of a baby, I am quite satisfied to bow and smile.(69)

For a final word on this matter of self-limitation, we shall recall that Chesterton not only presents it as a means to wonder, but also connects it with gratitude, which is an effect of wonder: "The proper form of thanks . . . is some form of . . . restraint: we should thank God for beer and Burgundy by not drinking too much of them."(70)

V. CONSIDERATION OF OUR EXILE CONDITION

In our consideration of the spirit of romance, we have already quoted Chesterton to the effect that when we are born, we are born into a romance by being born into uncongenial surroundings. He always had that feeling that he didn't quite belong in this world, that there was something wrong; and he assures us that he had this intimation of our exile condition before he had seriously considered the history of Eden and the story of the fall.

Chesterton already expressed this thought in a poem written at the age of sixteen:

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(69) G. K. CHESTERTON, All is Grist, p. 155.

(70) IDEM, Orthodoxy, pp. 117-118.

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Deep in the heart of every man, where'er his life be spent,
There is a noble weariness, a holy discontent.(71)

One of the characters in Manalive says:

"My grandmother . . . would have said that we were all in exile, and that no earthly house could cure the holy home-sickness that forbids us rest."(72)

After gaining in the knowledge of revelation regarding original sin he gives us his reaction:

The modern philosopher had told me again and again that I was in the right place, and I had still felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the wrong place, and my soul sang for joy, like a bird in spring. The knowledge found out and illuminated forgotten chambers in the dark house of infancy. I knew now why grass had always seemed to me as queer as the green beard of a giant, and why I could feel homesick at home.(73)

We see the immediate result of the full conviction of this exile condition was the awakening of wonder.

He compared this feeling of exile to an amnesia condition:

Every human being has forgotten who he is and where he came from. We are all blasted with one great obliteration of memory. We none of us saw ourselves born; and if we had, it would not have cleared up the mystery. Parents are a delight; they are not an explanation. The one thing that no man, however adventurous, can get behind, is his own existence; the one thing, that no man, however learned, can ever know, is his own name. It is easier to comprehend the cosmos than to comprehend the ego; it is easier even to know where you are than to know who you are. We have forgotten our own meaning, and

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(71) G. K. CHESTERTON, Adveniat Regnum Tuum, quoted in Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 31.

(72) IDEM, Manalive, p. 329.

(73) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 147.

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> we are all wandering about the streets without keepers. All that we call common sense and practicality and wordly wisdom only means that we forget that we have forgotten. All that we mean by religion and poetry only means that for one wild moment we remember that we forget.(74)

VI. TRAVEL

The next means of arousing wonder and building up the habit is to travel. This is a practical means suggested by Chesterton; but it is not travel used in the manner one would immediately imagine - to arouse wonder at the foreign things one would encounter in the excursions. "'Don't you see one only breaks the fence or shoots the moon in order to get home?'", asks Innocent Smith in Manalive.(75) You travel in order to appreciate the wonders of home:

> "I cannot see any Battersea here; I cannot see any London or any England. I cannot see that door. I cannot see that chair: because a cloud of sleep and custom has come across my eyes. The only way to get back to them is to go somewhere else; and that is the real object of travel and the real pleasure of holidays. Do you suppose that I go to France in order to see France? Do you suppose that I go to Germany in order to see Germany? I shall enjoy them both; but it is not them that I am seeking. I am seeking Battersea. The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land."(76)

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(74) G. K. CHESTERTON, Lunacy and Letters, p. 103.

(75) IDEM, Manalive, p. 314.

(76) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, pp. 245-246.

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He maintains that "'the only way to go to England is to go away from it.'"(77) In Orthodoxy he gives us the plan of a novel he was thinking of writing; in it an Englishman in a yacht discovers England under the impression it is a new South Seas island. He relates how this would stimulate the virtue of wonder:

> What could be more delightful than to have in the same few minutes all the fascinating terrors of going abroad combined with all the humane security of coming home again? What could be better than to have all the fun of discovering South Africa without the disgusting necessity of landing there? What could be more glorious than to brace one's self up to discover New South Wales and then realize, with a gush of happy tears, that it was really old South Wales. This at least seems to me the main problem for philosophers, and is in a manner the main problem of this book. How can we contrive to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it? How can this queer cosmic town, with its many-legged citizens, with its monstrous and ancient lamps, how can this world give us at once the fascination of a strange town and the comfort and honour of being our own town?(78)

(We will note that in the above passage he clearly enunciates his belief that this problem of the birth and growth of the spirit of wonder was "the main problem for philosophers". It was surely the problem to which he gave his life's efforts to solve. It was his mission.)

The reason we must travel in order to arouse wonder regarding the things of home, is that "there are things too

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(77) G. K. CHESTERTON, Tremendous Trifles, p. 246.

(78) IDEM, Orthodoxy, pp. 14-15.

big and obvious to be remembered."(79)

But while we travel we may as well use travel for arousing wonder at the foreign sights, too. And for these strange marvels Chesterton even offers us a little sample of wonder gymnastics in one of his books:

> I know no better exercise in that art of wonder, which is the life of man and the beginning of the praise of God, than to travel in a train through a long dark almost uninterrupted tunnel: until the traveler has grown almost accustomed to dusk and a dead blank background of brick. At last, after long stretches and at long intervals, the wall will suddenly break in two, and give a glowing glimpse of the land of the living.(80)

VII. SCIENTIFIC STUDIES

The last means suggested by Chesterton for the kindling of wonder is the study of natural science.

The problem present here is rather incoherently expressed by Innocent Smith:

> "People say vast universe . . . infinity and astronomy; not sure . . . I think things are too close together . . . packed up; for traveling; stars too close really . . . why, the sun's a star, too close to be seen at all . . . too many pebbles on the beach; ought to be put in rings; too many blades of grass to study . . . feathers on a bird make the brain reel; wait till the big bag is unpacked . . . may all be put in our right places then."(81)

More lucidly stated is the reason for Smith's difficulty:

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(79) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Is Grist, p. 32.

(80) IDEM, The Coloured Lands, p. 108.

(81) IDEM, Manalive, pp. 44-45.

> If people are to appreciate a pleasure it must be what children call a treat. It must stand out against the background of something else that is not quite so bright as itself. Otherwise we might as well try to paint in white on a whitewashed wall.(82)

Another reason behind the difficulty expressed is "the psychological fact that a man can only concentrate on one thing at a time."(83)

It seems to be obvious that the expected solution to the problem of arousing wonder at all these natural phenomena is a more minute examination of all the marvels of the universe.

This may mean sense observation, of course; but not necessarily. It may merely mean greater concentration and meditation to awaken us to what surrounds us:

> In the early days of the world, the discovery of a fact of natural history was immediately followed by the realization of it as a fact of poetry . . . . But for some mysterious reason this habit of realizing poetically the facts of science has ceased abruptly with scientific progress, and all the confounding portents preached by Galileo and Newton have fallen on deaf ears . . . . They declared that we are careering through space, clinging to a cannon-ball, and the poets ignore the matter as if it were a remark about the weather. They say that an invisible force holds us in our own armchairs while the earth hurtles like a boomerang; and men still go back to dusty records to prove the mercy of God.(84)

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(82) G. K. CHESTERTON, Sidelights on New London and Newer York, p. 58.

(83) Ibid., p. 59.

(84) IDEM, The Defendant, p. 78.

These, then, are the seven means to wonder suggested by Chesterton in his various works. This is the positive approach to wonder. We turn now to a more negative aspect of our battle toward the trophy of wonder.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ENEMIES OF WONDER I - SCEPTICISM

In this chapter it is our purpose to discuss the more negative aspects of our subject. We must defend wonder against its enemies. These are the vices opposed to the virtue of wonder.

The first enemy of wonder is scepticism, with its blood relatives of agnosticism, subjectivism or idealism, and relativism.

It is obvious that scepticism is opposed to wonder because it is opposed to integral parts of wonder. Certainly it is not reasonable to speak about the observation of things which you are not sure exist. And a thing must be known before it can be the object of the activity of the will. So the most evidently opposed integral parts of wonder are observation, the love of things, and enthusiasm for them. Later on we shall briefly show how scepticism is opposed to other parts of wonder.

Chesterton's description of the great awakening of wonder as a reaction to the spread of scepticism is of great interest as a pronouncement issued by the Chestertonian prophetic spirit; but it is also of use to us here to understand how definitely the author himself considered this philosophical system and the related "isms" as prime hostile agents directed against everything for which he stood:

> Truths turn into dogmas the instant that they are disputed. Thus every man who utters a doubt defines a religion. And the scepticism of our time does not really destroy the beliefs, rather it creates them; gives them their limits and their plain and defiant shape . . . . The great march of mental destruction will go on. Everything will be denied. Everything will become a creed. It is a reasonable position to deny the stones in the street; it will be a religious dogma to assert them. It is a rational thesis that we are all in a dream; it will be a mystical sanity to say that we are all awake. Fires will be kindled to testify that two and two make four. Swords will be drawn to prove that leaves are green in summer. We shall be left defending, not only the incredible virtues and sanities of human life, but something more incredible still, this huge impossible universe which stares us in the face. We shall fight for visible prodigies as if they were invisible. We shall look on the impossible grass and the skies with a strange courage. We shall be of those who have seen and yet have believed.(1)

Chesterton repeated this prophecy - or rather took for granted it was already being fulfilled - in a later book of essays:

> The intense interest of the moment is that the Man of Science, the hero of the modern world and the latest of the great servants of humanity, has suddenly and dramatically refused to have anything more to do with this dreary business of nibbling negation, and blind scratching and scraping away of the very foundations of the mastery of man. For the work of the sceptic for the past hundred years has indeed been very like the fruitless fury of some primeval monster; eyeless, mindless, merely destructive and devouring; a giant worm wasting away a world that he could not even see; a benighted and bestial life, unconscious of its own cause and of its own consequences. But Man has taken to himself again his own weapons; will

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, pp. 304-305.

> and worship and reason and the vision of the plan in things; and we are once more in the morning of the world.(2)

The phrase "the morning of the world" again shows us that he considered us to be living in a period ripe for the resurgence of wonder.

Let us give just one more passage in which he demonstrates his mental linkage of scepticism and wonder as natural foes:

> The sceptic feels himself too large to measure life by the largest things; and ends by measuring it by the smallest thing of all. There is produced also a sort of subconscious ossification; which hardens the mind not only against the traditions of the past, but even against the surprises of the future. Nil admirari becomes the motto of all nihilists; and it ends, in the most complete and exact sense, in nothing.(3)

We know that scepticism means the denial of the possibility of all knowledge. But Chesterton has more colorful definitions and descriptions of scepticism and allied philosophical systems.

He says that it "implies a dogma of hopelessness and a definite belief in unbelief."(4) It is "kicking a man merely because he is up."(5) "The general rule is that nothing must be accepted on any ancient or admitted authority, but everything must be accepted on any new or nameless authority,

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(2) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Well and the Shallows, pp. 82-83.

(3) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 254.

(4) IDEM, George Bernard Shaw, p. 72.

(5) IDEM, Varied Types, p. 266.

or accepted even more eagerly on no authority at all."(6) The method of idealism is that: "When you find a life entirely incredible and incomprehensible from the outside, you pretend that you understand the inside."(7) Cynics were "born dead."(8) Agnosticism he pictures as "willing to believe good as evil and to harbour faith as doubt . . . "(9) "Agnosticism, the ancient creed of Confucius, is a simplification; it is a shutting out of all the shadowy splendours and terrors; an Arcadian exclusiveness; il faut cultiver son jardin."(10) If the agnostics say "that the cosmos is incomprehensible, and really mean (as most moderns do) that it is not worth comprehending; then it would be much better for your Greek agnosticism if it were called by its Latin name of ignorance."(11) The sceptic holds that "we must all reconcile ourselves to thinking differently, because no thinking is any good and it is better not to think at all."(12) He holds "the decadent doctrine that in so mad a place as the world, every one must be by the nature of things wrong."(13)

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(6) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Is Grist, p. 131.
(7) IDEM, All Things Considered, p. 200.
(8) IDEM, in the Return to Chesterton, by Maisie Ward, p. 246.
(9) IDEM, G. F. Watts, p. 143.
(10) IDEM, William Blake, pp. 203-204.
(11) IDEM, A Handful of Authors, p. 163.
(12) IDEM, Come to Think of It, p. 121.
(13) IDEM, Robert Browning, p. 175.

As to the method of the sceptic, ("the modern world will accept no dogmas upon any authority, but it will accept any dogmas upon no authority."(14)) Chesterton gives an example of what he means:

> Say that a thing is so, according to the Pope or the Bible, and it will be dismissed as a superstition without examination. But preface your remark merely with "they say" or "don't you know that?" or try (and fail) to remember the name of some professor mentioned in some newspaper; and the keen rationalism of the modern mind will accept every word you say.(15)

We find another example of this kind in one of his novels:

> "You've got to understand one of the tricks of the modern mind, a tendency that most people obey without noticing it.
>
> "In the village or suburb outside there's an inn with the sign of St. George and the Dragon. Now suppose I went about telling everybody that this was only a corruption of King George and the Dragoon. Scores of people would believe it, without any inquiry, from a vague feeling that it's probable because it's prosaic. It turns something romantic and legendary into something recent and ordinary . . . . And that somehow makes it sound rational, though it is unsupported by reason. Of course, some people would have the sense to remember having seen St. George in old Italian pictures and French romances; but a good many wouldn't think about it at all. They would just swallow the scepticism because it was scepticism. Modern intelligence won't accept anything on authority. That's exactly what has happened here."(16)

Chesterton ridicules the sceptic in a satirical piece wherein he has him express the sentiments that: "They might

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(14) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Superstition of Divorce, p. 70.

(15) Ibid.

(16) IDEM, The Man Who Knew Too Much, pp. 94-95.

have discovered America, but he had not: he would take nothing superstitiously or on authority but wished to verify everything for himself. He had no proof even that 'this island' as he used to call it, existed."(17)

Father Croteau, in his comprehensive work, Critica, stresses in his refutation of idealism the absurdities to which it leads.(18) Chesterton is equally vehement in his denunciation of these ridiculous philosophers.

He considers the sceptic much worse than the materialist:

> There is a sceptic far more terrible than he who believes that everything began in matter. It is possible to meet the sceptic who believes that everything began in himself. He doubts not the existence of angels or devils, but the existence of men and cows. For him his own friends are a mythology made up by himself. He created his own father and his own mother.(19)

In the same context Chesterton speaks of the sceptic as "insane" and being enclosed in a "cell".

Certainly this is true: "If a man denies the facts, there is no answer but to lock him up."(20)

What keeps men sane? In Orthodoxy he says: "Mysticism

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(17) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Coloured Lands, p. 125.

(18) Jacques CROTEAU, Critica, 2nd ed., Ottawa, U. of Ottawa, 1958, 3 vol.

(19) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, p. 45.

(20) IDEM, Eugenics and Other Evils, p. 43.

keeps men sane."(21) Here he speaks of the "seed of dogma"(22) which is mysterious but makes other things lucid. In another book he says: "All sane men are dogmatic."(23) And to remain sane they should accept dogmas: "It was precisely creed and dogma that saved the sanity of the world."(24) The example he uses in this context to prove his point is the case of Manichaeism, especially with regard to its condemnation of marriage.

Chesterton pours further ridicule on scepticism in a parable titled "The Professor and the Cook":

> "I wish I could wake up," he said. "It is quite obvious by all scientific processes of thought that this is a nightmare. My arguments disproving this fabulous creature were quite conclusive. The only deduction is a dream."
>
> "But see," said the Cook, "let us be logical. If you are only dreaming that you see the Serpent, so also you are only dreaming that you had the scientific argument. If one is an illusion, why not the other. But if your argument is an illusion, the Serpent may not be an illusion. And so we go on."
>
> "I wish to wake up," repeated the Professor firmly. "Will you kindly stab me with one of those large carving knives you carry. As they are entirely subjective carving knives the depth of the stab will be immaterial."(25)

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(21) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, p. 48.

(22) Ibid., p. 49.

(23) IDEM, G. F. Watts, p. 70.

(24) IDEM, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 128.

(25) IDEM, The Coloured Lands, pp. 152-153.

He has a satirical poem on scepticism, done in free verse (which he heartily disliked). It begins thus:

I curse paradox -
I curse the contradictory inconsistencies of the Modern Mind:
I curse and curse and curse . . .

Those who dogmatise about the folly of dogma:
Those who moralise about the non-existence of morals:
Those who say people are too stupid to educate their children
But not too stupid to educate others':
Those who say we can be certain of nothing.
Because we are so certain of all the exploded evolutionary hypotheses
That show we can be certain of nothing . . .(26)

Another poem shows his contempt for the agnostic mind:

John Grubby, who was short and stout
And troubled with religious doubt,
Refused about the age of three
To sit upon the curate's knee;
(For so the eternal strife must rage
Between the spirit of the age
And Dogma, which, as is well known,
Does simply hate to be outgrown).
Grubby, the young idea that shoots,
Outgrew the ages like old boots;
While still, to all appearance, small,
Would have no Miracles at all;
And just before the age of ten
Firmly refused Free Will to men.
The altars reeled, the heavens shook,
Just as he read of in the book.(27)

Grubby goes on to great worldly success in business through oppression of the poor; and he rises in the echelons of the English government to sit in the House of Lords:

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(26) G. K. CHESTERTON, A Curse in Free Verse, in Maisie Ward, The Return to Chesterton, p. 213.

(27) IDEM, The New Freethinker, in The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, pp. 150-151.

No matter. This can still be said:
Never to supernatural dread,
Never to unseen deity,
Did Sir John Grubby bend the knee;
Never did dream of hell or wrath
Turn Viscount Grubby from his path;
Nor was he bribed by fabled bliss
To kneel to any world but this.
The curate lives in Camden Town,
His lap still empty of renown,
And still across the waste of years
John Grubby, in the House of Peers,
Faces that curate, proud and free,
And never sits upon his knee.(28)

In dealing with the philosophy of St. Thomas, Chesterton gives us a serious and clear presentation of the problem of scepticism:

> Thus, even those who appreciate the metaphysical depth of Thomism in other matters have expressed surprise that he does not deal at all with what many now think the main metaphysical question; whether we can prove that the primary act of recognition of any reality is real. The answer is that St. Thomas recognized instantly, what so many modern sceptics have begun to suspect rather laboriously, that a man must either answer that question in the affirmative, or else never answer any question; never ask any question; never even exist intellectually, to answer or to ask. I suppose it is true in a sense that a man can be a fundamental sceptic; but he cannot be anything else; certainly not even a defender of fundamental scepticism. If a man feels that all the movements of his own mind are meaningless, then his mind is meaningless, and he is meaningless; and it does not mean anything to attempt to discover his meaning. Most fundamental sceptics appear to survive, because they are not consistently sceptical and not at all fundamental. They will first deny everything and then admit something, if for the sake of argument - or often rather of attack without argument. I saw an almost startling example of this essential frivolity, in the professor of final scepticism, in a paper the other day. A man

(28) G. K. CHESTERTON, The New Freethinker in The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, pp. 151-152.

> wrote to say that he accepted nothing but Solipsism, and added that he had often wondered it was not a more common philosophy. Now Solipsism simply means that a man believes in his own existence, but not in anybody or anything else. And it never struck this simple sophist, that if his philosophy were true, there obviously were no other philosophers to profess it.
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> To this question "Is there anything?" St. Thomas begins by answering "Yes"; if he began by answering "No", it would not be the beginning, but the end. That is what some of us call common sense.(29) Either there is no philosophy, no philosophers, no thinkers, no thought, no anything; or else there is a real bridge between the mind and reality. But he is actually less exacting than many thinkers, much less so than most rationalist and materialist thinkers, as to what that first step involves; he is content, as we shall see, to say that it involves the recognition of Ens or Being as something definitely beyond ourselves, Ens is Ens: Eggs are eggs, and it is not tenable that all eggs were found in a mare's nest.(30)

Chesterton confesses his disinclination to enter into debate with the sceptic:

> "There is no sense in reasoning with a man who denies any validity in reason; it is vain to convict of injustice a man who declares his disbelief in justice; it is idle to offer ocular demonstration to the really consistent sceptic, who cannot believe his own eyes."(31)

This disinclination, however, seemed to be merely theoretical with Chesterton, for he did, indeed, debate this very subject. He tells us about it:

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(29) Chesterton's use of the word "common sense" here may be controversial, but we must remember the audience to which he was directing his exposition of Thomistic philosophy. For further discussion of this subject see CROTEAU's Critica, v. II, cap. ii, q. 2, art. 9.

(30) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. 175-177.

(31) IDEM, Christendom in Dublin, p. 43.

> And the whole argument worked out ultimately to this: that the question is whether a man can be certain of anything at all. I think he can be certain, for if . . . it is impossible intellectually to entertain certainty, what is this certainty which it is impossible to entertain? If I have never experienced such a thing as certainty I cannot even say that a thing is not certain. Similarly, if I have never experienced such a thing as green I cannot even say that my nose is not green. It may be as green as possible for all I know, if I have really no experience of greenness. So we shouted at each other and shook the room; because metaphysics is the only thoroughly emotional thing. And the difference between us was very deep, because it was a difference as to the object of the whole thing called broad-mindedness or the opening of the intellect. For my friend said that he opened his intellect as the sun opens the fans of a palm tree, opening for opening's sake, opening infinitely for ever. But I said that I opened my intellect as I opened my mouth, in order to shut it again on something solid. I was doing it at the moment. And as I truly pointed out, it would look uncommonly silly if I went on opening my mouth infinitely, for ever and ever.(32)

The disinclination which Chesterton so vehemently professes with regard to debates with the pure sceptic, he proclaims also with reference to the idealist. Idealism he calls "the horrible and degrading heresy that our minds are merely manufactured by accidental conditions, and therefore have no ultimate relation to truth at all."(33) His attitude to these people is this:

> With all possible apologies to the freethinkers, I still propose to hold myself free to think. And anybody who will think for two minutes will see that this thought is the end of all thinking. It is useless to argue at all, if all our conclusions

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(32) G. K. CHESTERTON, Tremendous Trifles, pp. 34-35. Cf. Autobiography, pp. 228-229.

(33) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 27.

are warped by our conditions. Nobody can correct anybody's bias if all mind is all bias.(34)

Chesterton calls attention to the fact that there are certain self-evident principles which need no demonstration. He says that "the fundamental things in a man are not the things he explains, but rather the things he forgets to explain."(35)

He attacks "the stubborn prejudice of the sceptic."(36) This he does in retaliation for the sceptic's charge of prejudice on our part:

> There is in modern discussion of religion and philosophy an absurd assumption that a man is in some way just and well-poised because he has come to no conclusion; and that a man is in some way knocked off the list of fair judges because he has come to a conclusion. It is assumed that the sceptic has no bias, whereas he has a very obvious bias in favour of scepticism. I remember once arguing with an honest young atheist, who was very much shocked at my disputing some of the assumptions which were absolute sanctities to him (such as the quite unproved proposition of the independence of matter and the quite improbable proposition of its power to originate mind), and he at length fell back upon this question, which he delivered with an honourable heat of defiance and indignation: "Well, can you tell me any man of intellect, great in science or philosophy, who accepted the miraculous?" I said, "With pleasure. Descartes, Dr. Johnson, Newton, Paraday, Newman, Gladstone, Pasteur, Browning, Brunetiere - as many more as you please." To which that quite admirable and idealistic young man made this astonishing reply - "Oh, but of course they had

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(34) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, p. 27.

(35) IDEM, Superstition of Divorce, pp. 35-36.

(36) IDEM, St. Francis of Assisi, p. 13.

> to say that; they were Christians." First he challenged me to find a black swan, and then he ruled out all my swans because they were black. The fact that all these great intellects had come to the Christian view was somehow or other a proof either that they were not great intellects or that they had not really come to the view. The argument thus stood in a charmingly convenient form: "All men that count have come to my conclusion; for if they come to your conclusion they do not count."(37)

Although the reference here is particularly to the question of miracles, the argument applies to the general attitude of sceptics. The attitude is an attitude of intellectual pride, of which we shall have more to say later. At any rate, as Chesterton tells us:

> It is manifestly most unreasonable that intelligent men should be divided upon the absurd modern principle of regarding every clever man who cannot make up his mind as an impartial judge, and regarding every clever man who can make up his mind as a servile fanatic.(38)

Here he comes up with one of his paradoxical gems: "We say that a judge is not a judge because he gives judgment."(39)

Chesterton has thus turned against the sceptic himself the challenge of prejudice. He does the same with regard to the doubt of the sceptic:

> In dealing with the arrogant asserter of doubt, it is not the right method to tell him to stop doubting.

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(37) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Things Considered, pp. 154-155.

(38) Ibid., p. 156.

(39) Ibid.

> It is rather the right method to tell him to go on doubting, to doubt a little more, to doubt every day newer and wilder things in the universe, until at last, by some strange enlightenment, he may begin to doubt himself.(40)

The process which must go on in the mind of the sceptic who follows this procedure is described in Orthodoxy:

> If you are merely a sceptic, you must sooner or later ask yourself the question, "Why should anything go right; even observation and deduction? Why should not good logic be as misleading as bad logic? They are both movements in the brain of a bewildered ape?" The young sceptic says, "I have a right to think for myself." But the old sceptic, the complete sceptic, says, "I have no right to think for myself. I have no right to think at all."
>
> There is a thought that stops thought. That is the only thought that ought to be stopped. That is the ultimate evil against which all religious authority was aimed. It only appears at the end of decadent ages like our own . . . . (41)

There are two especially baneful results from scepticism. The first is that there is grave harm to civilized society, and the second that the practical application of the theory of scepticism leads to constraint, servitude, paralysis of action on the part of the individual sceptic.

The effects of scepticism on civilized society is thus expressed by Chesterton:

> Sceptics do not succeed in pulling up the roots of Christianity; but they do succeed in pulling up the roots of every man's ordinary vine and fig tree, of every man's garden . . . . Secularists have not succeeded in wrecking divine things; but Secularists have succeeded in wrecking secular things . . . .

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(40) G. K. CHESTERTON, G. K. C. As M. C., p. 46.

(41) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 58.

They cannot smash religion; but they do smash everything else . . . . But you have (if that is any comfort to you) made a certain havoc in common morals and common sense.(42)

With regard to the effect on the individual (with obvious repercussions on society) Chesterton has this to say:

When you leave everything in a more or less sceptical and undecided condition, what happens is not necessarily, or perhaps even generally, extravagance and madness, but in a sense the very opposite. What happens is constraint and servitude, that is to say, that one of the immediate results of cutting loose is, for some reason that I do not understand, that you chain yourself up again and chain yourself much more completely.(43)

He explains this in another book:

But in fact, the sceptic is hampered by invisible chains, in his most human movements, more than the lowest slave of superstition. The man who cannot lift his eyes to the sky, or bend his knee to the earth, is crippled and caught in a network of negations.(44)

We find further explanation of his meaning in his essay on The Return to Religion:

Religion has returned; because all the various forms of scepticism that tried to take its place and do its work, have by this time tied themselves into such knots that they cannot do anything. That chain of causation of which they were fond of talking seems really to have served them after the fashion of the proverbial rope; and when modern discussion gave them rope enough, they quite rapidly hanged themselves. For there is not a single one

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(42) G. K. CHESTERTON, Lunacy and Letters, p. 191.

(43) IDEM, The Superstitions of a Sceptic, p. 6.

(44) IDEM, Come To Think Of It, p. 262.

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> of the fashionable forms of scientific scepticism, or determinism, that does not end in stark paralysis, touching the practical conduct of human life. Take any three of the normal and necessary ideas on which civilization and even society depend.(45)

The first idea is that we have common sense and common moral persuasions. Here the sceptic answers that these are mere taboos and prejudices followed because of blind herd instinct. Then the normal man appeals to his conscience; but the sceptic says this is just a matter of heredity and environment. The third point the normal man makes is that there is experimental science; but the sceptic points out some of the uncertainties of scientists and mockingly asks: "'Does that help you on a bit, in founding your sane and solid society?'"(46)

Chesterton says that the sceptical inroads on our way of living have been such that we have a glimpse of what pagan society means and what it means to lose the way of reason in our civilized institutions:

> A world in which men know that most of what they know is probably untrue cannot be dignified with the name of a sceptical world; it is simply an impotent and abject world, not attacking anything, but accepting everything while trusting nothing; accepting even its own incapacity to attack; acepting its own lack of authority to accept; doubting its very right to doubt . . . . We did not ourselves think that the mere denial of our dogmas could end in such dehumanised and demented anarchy. It might have taken the world a long time to understand that what it had been taught to dismiss as mediaeval theology was often

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(45) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Well and the Shallows, p. 75.

(46) Ibid., p. 77.

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> mere common sense; although the very term common sense, or communis sententia was a mediaeval conception. But it took the world very little time to understand that the talk on the other side was most uncommon nonsense. It was nonsense that could not be made the basis of any common system, such as has been founded upon common sense.(47)

The example he singles out as an illustration of the madness of the modern world following the lead of the sceptics is the example of marriage and how it has been transformed into a matter of mood. This shows "how scepticism has recently changed from apparent sense to quite self-evident nonsense. The heresies not only decay but destroy themselves; in any case they perish without a blow."(48) In the reply that the sane man makes to the sceptic the idea of paralysis due to scepticism is again expanded:

> "If you feel like that, why certainly you will not found families; or found anything else. You will not build houses; you will not make partnerships; you will not in any fashion do the business of the world. You will never plant a tree, lest you wish next week you had planted it somewhere else; you will never put a potato into a pot or stew, because it will be too late to take it out again; your whole mood is stricken and riddled with cowardice and sterility; your whole way of attacking any problem is to think of excuses for not attacking it at all. Very well; so be it; the Lord be with you. You may be respected for being sincere; you may be pitied for being sensitive; you may retain some of the corrective qualities which make it useful on occasion to be sceptical. But if you are too sceptical to do these things, you must stand out of the way of those who can do them; you must hand over the world to

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(47) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Well and the Shallows, pp. 79-80.

(48) Ibid., p. 81.

> those who believe that the world is workable; to those who believe that men can make houses, make partnerships, make appointments, make promises - and keep them. And if it is necessary in order to keep a promise or boil a potato or behave like a human being, to believe in God making Man, in God being made Man, or in God made Man coming in the clouds of glory - well, then you must at least give a chance to these credulous fanatics who can believe the one and who can do the other." That is what I mean by the spiritual Survival of the Fittest. That is why the old phrase, which is probably a mistake in natural history, is a truth in supernatural history. The organic thing called religion has in fact the organs that take hold on life. It can feed where the fastidious doubter finds no food; it can reproduce where the solitary sceptic boasts of being barren. It may be accepting a miracle to believe in free will; but it is accepting madness, sooner or later, to disbelieve in it. It may be a wild risk to make a vow; but it is a quiet, crawling and inevitable ruin to refuse to make a vow. It may be incredible that one creed is the truth and the others are relatively false; but it is not only incredible, but also intolerable, that there is no truth either in or out of the creeds, and all are equally false. For nobody can ever set anything right, if everybody is equally wrong.(49)

Chesterton goes on to call scepticism "nibbling negation, and blind scratching and scraping away of the very foundations of the mastery of man."(50)

Chesterton's first essay in The Thing is entitled The Sceptic as a Critic. In this treatise he again stresses the paralysis of the sceptic:

> In plain words, the normal functions of man - effort, protest, judgment, persuasion, and proof - are found in fact to be hampered and hamstrung by these negations

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(49) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Well and the Shallows, pp. 81-82.

(50) Ibid., p. 83.

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> of the sceptic even when the sceptic seems at first to be only denying some distant vision or some miraculous tale . . . . Men can be frozen by fatalism, or crazed by anarchism, or driven to death by pessimism; for men will not go on indefinitely acting on what they feel to be a fable. And it is in this organic and almost muscular sense that religion is really the help of man - in the sense that without it he is ultimately helpless, almost motionless.(51)

The same challenge that Chesterton issued in The Well and the Shallows is again issued to the sceptic in verse form in a poem written on the fly-leaf of a book he gave to a friend:

> Go: teach the doubters what they doubt - that we,
> Who smell the wind beyond the world are free;
> That ours, not theirs, the light on lands untrod,
> The galloping on the mountain, and the God;
> That ours, not theirs, the thunderclap and the cry
> When things too huge for fable hurtle by;
> That doubts chain up the spirit, and dogmas free;
> And, throned on marble, men see Liberty.(52)

As a parting blow to scepticism from the pen of the master before we discuss the ancestors and existing relatives of scepticism, we quote here an isolated entry from his youthful Notebook:

> "Is a man proud of losing his hearing, eyesight or sense of smell? What shall we say of him who prides himself on beginning as an intellectual cripple and ending as an intellectual corpse?"(53)

Chesterton names as some of the causes of scepticism,

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(51) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Thing, pp. 8-9.

(52) IDEM, quoted in Maisie Ward, The Return to Chesterton, p. 239.

(53) IDEM, quoted in Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 58.

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a false biology or physiology, a false psychology, and a certain "escapism".

The biologists to whom he refers are the Behaviourists:

> Everybody knows that a new school of sceptics has recently appeared, especially in America; they call themselves the Behaviourists, and the late Mr. Harvey Wickham called them the Misbehaviourists. So far as I can understand, their philosophy is rooted in a theory of physiology: the theory that thought is originally a sort of movement of the body rather than the brain. "There is nothing in the brain," I think one of them has written, "except a lot of neurons. We do not think with our minds. We think with our muscles."(54)

In another book he shows the contradictions involved in the teachings of such a school of thought:

> I deny that biology can destroy the sense of truth, which alone can even desire biology. No truth which I find can deny that I am seeking the truth. My mind cannot find anything which denies my mind . . . .(55)

The psychological teachings that are partially to blame for the rise of scepticism in modern thought are those of Freud and his psychoanalysis, which Chesterton evaluates as "generally more of a fashion than a science."(56) His criticism of its effects in the direction of scepticism he states as follows:

> And the science of Freud would make itessentially impossible to say how far our reason or unreason does go, or where it stops. For if a man is ignorant of his other self, how can he possibly know that the

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(54) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Is Grist, p. 45.

(55) IDEM, Alarms and Discursions, p. 227.

(56) IDEM, As I Was Saying, p. 204.

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> other self is ignorant? He can no longer say with pride that at least he knows that he knows nothing. That is exactly what he does not know. The floor has fallen out of his mind, and the abyss below may contain subconscious certainties as well as subconscious doubts. He is too ignorant even to ignore; and he must confess himself an agnostic about whether he is an agnostic.(57)

The final cause Chesterton gives for scepticism in today's thinking is what is now called "escapism": "Many of the rich took to scepticism exactly as the poor took to drink; because it was a way out."(58)

Since we have but to turn our eyes to the world about us to see the truth of Chesterton's desolate picture of the ravages of scepticism, it is no wonder to us that he says in one of his poems: "There is one sin: to call a green leaf grey,/Whereat the sun in heaven shuddereth."(59)

The reason that Chesterton is so optimistic in his prophecy from The Well and the Shallows quoted at the beginning of this chapter is because he is of the belief that we are at the end of an era in human history and the beginning of a new and better one:

> The mere questioner has knocked his head against the limits of human thought; and cracked it. This is what makes so futile the warnings of the orthodox and the boasts of the advanced about the dangerous boyhood of free thought. What we are looking at is

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(57) G. K. CHESTERTON, The New Jerusalem, p. 180.

(58) IDEM, Eugenics and Other Evils, p. 160.

(59) IDEM, Ecclesiastes, in The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, p. 310.

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> not the boyhood of free thought; it is the old age and ultimate dissolution of free thought. It is vain for bishops and pious bigwigs to discuss what dreadful things will happen if wild scepticism runs its course. It has run its course. It is vain for eloquent atheists to talk of the great truths that will be revealed if once we see free thought begin. We have seen it end. It has no more questions to ask; it has questioned itself. You cannot call up any wilder vision than a city in which men ask themselves if they have any selves. You cannot fancy a more sceptical world than that in which men doubt if there is a world . . . . If any frightened curate still says that it will be awful if the darkness of free thought should spread, we can only answer him in the high and powerful words of Mr. Belloc, "Do not, I beseech you, be troubled about the increase of forces already in dissolution. You have mistaken the hour of the night: it is already morning." We have no more questions left to ask. We have looked for questions in the darkest corners and on the wildest peaks. We have found all the questions that can be found. It is time we gave up looking for questions and began looking for answers.(60)

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENTS AGAINST SCEPTICISM

Chesterton's arguments against scepticism (in the order in which they have been presented by means of the various quotations preceeding) may be summed up as follows:

1. It is absurd to reject all authority or tradition.

2. Historically creed and dogma, utterly opposed to everything for which scepticism stands, have saved the sanity of the world.

3. If everything else is an illusion, so are the arguments of the sceptic.

4. Sceptics are certain they are not certain, involving

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(60) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 65-66.

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themselves in manifest contradiction.

5. The intellect, like the mouth, opens in order to close again on something solid. It has an end.

6. There are certain self-evident principles which need no demonstration.

7. Sceptics, accusing others of bias, are themselves biased to the extent that they discount the intelligence of their opponents.

8. Sceptics are guilty of intellectual pride.

9. Sceptics should logically come to the conclusion that they have no right to think at all.

10. Grave harm comes to the institutions of civilized society as an effect of sceptical teachings.

11. The individual is put into a condition of constraint or paralysis like servitude because of his acceptance of the doctrine of scepticism.

12. The sceptic, by calling them mere taboos and prejudices, destroys the moral persuasions of society, and thereby contributes to the moral corruption of society.

13. The sceptic, by relegating conscience to the deterministic realm, molded by heredity and environment, accomplishes a similar decay of morals.

14. Scientists themselves cannot be both scientists and sceptics.

15. Scepticism produces an "impotent and abject world."

16. Sceptics, if truly sceptics, must step out of the

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way and let those run the world who do not think as they do. It is the survival of the fittest.

17. Doubt is the ally of inaction.

18. Scepticism is intellectual suicide.

19. Behaviorism and Freudianism and any other "ism" leading to scepticism are all false doctrines.

20. Historically scepticism has run its course and the situation in the modern world demonstrates its failure.

CHAPTER NINE

THE ENEMIES OF WONDER II - RELATIVISM

Rooted in the idealism of which we have already spoken is the doctrine of relativism, defined by Grenier as "the teaching of those who contend that any judgment we make concerning a thing may be changed and yet always be a true judgment, even though the thing concerning which the judgment is made remains entirely unchanged."(1)

Chesterton would say it is a doctrine which "maintains that there are no secure and reliable ideas upon which we can rest with a final mental satisfaction."(2)

The resulting atmosphere in the modern world is one of mood or taste or fashion: "Instead of the liberty of dogma, you have the tyranny of taste.(3) Because of this dictatorship of fashion he predicts "that the age . . . may yet have to look forward to its own appearance in history, as a type of tyranny and slavery and stiff as the mummies of the dead."(4) He maintains that we "are following the conventions far too much."(5) These conventions are not

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(1) Henri GRENIER, Thomistic Philosophy, transl. by J. P. O'HANLEY, Charlottetown, Canada, St. Dunstan's U., 1950, vol. III, p. 111.

(2) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 81.

(3) IDEM, A Miscellany of Men, p. 140.

(4) IDEM, All I Survey, p. 255.

(5) IDEM, All Is Grist, p. 6.

worth such serious consideration:

> For a fashion is a custom without a cause. A fashion is a custom to which men cannot get accustomed; simply because it is without a cause. That is why our industrial societies, touching every topic from the cosmos to the coat-collars, are merely swept by a succession of modes which are merely moods.(6)

As an example of what he means we find a passage in which he discusses the tenet of democracy, the equality of men:

> I have therefore found in my middle age this curious fact about the lesson of my life, and that of all my generation. We all grew up with a common conviction, lit by the flames of the literary genius of Rouseau, of Shelley, of Victor Hugo, finding its final flare-up and conflagration in the universalism of Walt Whitman. And we all took it for granted that all our descendants would take it for granted. I said the discovery of brotherhood seemed like the discovery of broad daylight; of something that men could never grow tired of. Yet even in my own short lifetime, men have already grown tired of it. We cannot now appeal to the love of equality as an <u>emotion</u> . . . . We realize that in most men it has died, because it was a mood and not a doctrine. And we begin to wonder too late, in the wise fashion of the aged, how we could ever have expected it to last as a mood, if it was not strong enough to last as a doctrine. And we also begin to realize that all the real strength there was in it, which is the only strength that remains in it, was the original strength of the doctrine.(7)

This substitution of mood for basic thought has led the modern world into a pitiable situation:

> The truth is that the modern world has had a mental breakdown; much more than a moral breakdown. Things are being settled by mere associations because there

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(6) G. K. CHESTERTON, <u>Irish Impressions</u>, p. 48.

(7) IDEM, <u>The Thing</u>, p. 19.

> is a reluctance to settle them by arguments. Nearly all the talk about what is advanced and what is antiquated has become a sort of giggling excitement about fashions.(8)

The moderns have become "a simple race, a little like savages."(9)

This deplorable modern mentality is seen in the journalistic conduct of the day: "The increasing inconclusiveness of most articles in the Press and elsewhere seems to me the most disquieting mark of our mental development."(10) Another instance is found in any discussion about the moral standards required for motion-picture films: "I have, indeed, a definite objection to immoral films, but it is becoming more and more difficult to discuss a definite morality with people whose very immorality is indefinite."(11)

The modern men work in a disordered manner:

> They do what they want, and make up reasons for it afterwards; but even the reasons are rather too cunning to be reasonable. In a word, it is this chaos, in the creed and code of conduct, that prevents a man from finding in it any sort of guide. . . . (12)

This inane method of procedure is something which breeds fear for the future in the heart of any thinking man:

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(8) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Thing, p. 56.

(9) Ibid.

(10) IDEM, As I Was Saying, p. 85.

(11) Ibid., p. 187.

(12) IDEM, All I Survey, p. 51.

> I should very much like to see some of these good-natured groping people draw up something like a plan or table of their real conception of a social structure, and of the necessary commandments of society. The newspapers talk about the danger of Bolshevism, and the Red Peril. But I am afraid of the Patchwork Peril, which is all colours and none; I am afraid of bits of Bolshevism and bits of insane individualism and bits of independence in the wrong place, floating hither and thither and colliding with they know not what; the icebergs whose very shapelessness, or incalculable shape, has always been the cause of shipwreck.(13)

One of the proponents of this relativism was H. G. Wells, one of the famous opponents of Chesterton. In Heretics Chesterton gives his evidence that Wells is a relativist:

> He says, "Nothing endures, nothing is precise and certain . . . there is no being, but a universal becoming of individualities . . . . " Mr. Wells says, again, "There is no abiding thing in what we know. We change from weaker to stronger lights, and each more powerful light pierces our hitherto opaque foundations and reveals fresh and different opacities below."(14)

Chesterton answers the Wells' philosophy as follows:

> Now, when Mr. Wells says things like this, I speak with all respect when I say that he does not observe an evident mental distinction. It cannot be true that there is nothing abiding in what we know. For if that were so we should not know at all and should not call it knowledge. Our mental state may be very different from that of somebody else some thousands of years back; but it cannot be entirely different, or else we should not be conscious of a difference. Mr. Wells must surely realize the first and simplest of the paradoxes that sit by the spring of truth. He must surely see that the fact of two things being

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(13) G. K. CHESTERTON, All I Survey, p. 54.

(14) IDEM, Heretics, p. 81.

different implies that they are similar. The hare and the tortoise may differ in the quality of swiftness, but they must agree in the quality of motion. The swiftest hare cannot be swifter than an isosceles triangle or the idea of pinkness. When we say the hare moves faster, we say that the tortoise moves. And when we say of a thing that it moves, we say, without need of other words, that there are things that do not move. And even in the act of saying that things change, we say that there is something unchangeable.

But certainly the best example of Mr. Wells's fallacy can be found in the example which he himself chooses. It is quite true that we see a dim light which, compared with a darker thing, is light, but which, compared with a stronger light, is darkness. But the quality of light remains the same thing, or else we should not call it a stronger light or recognize it as such. If the character of light were not fixed in the mind, we should be quite likely to call a denser shadow a stronger light, or vice versa. If the character of light became even for an instant unfixed, if it became even by a hair's-breadth doubtful, if, for example, there crept into our idea of light some vague idea of blueness, then in that flash we have become doubtful whether the new light has more light or less. In brief, the progress may be varying as a cloud, but the direction must be as rigid as a French road. North and South are relative in the sense that I am North of Bournemouth and South of Spitzbergen. But if there be any doubt of the position of the North Pole, there is in equal degree a doubt of whether I am South of Spitzbergen at all. The absolute idea of light may be practically unattainable. We may not be able to get to the North Pole. But because the North Pole is unattainable, it does not follow that it is indefinable. And it is only because the North Pole is not indefinable that we can make a satisfactory map of Brighton and Worthing.(15)

Chesterton here gives credit to Plato for his "museum of specified ideals" insofar as it showed that Plato believed that there was something that did not change and that this

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(15) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, pp. 81-83.

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unchangeable thing was not in the realm of the material, but in abstract ideas.

Chesterton then discusses a play by Wells which he compares to the play of George Bernard Shaw which expounds the Superman idea. This idea, says Chesterton, is

> open to the same intellectual attack. We cannot be expected to have any regard for a great creature if he does not in any manner conform to our standards. For unless he passes our standard of greatness we cannot even call him great.(16)

Nietszche, of course, is famous for his Superman thesis, too. Chesterton shows how Nietszche implicitly contradicts relativism when he says that man is a thing which has to be surpassed:

> But the very word "surpass" implies the existence of a standard common to us and the thing surpassing us. If the Superman is more manly than men are, of course they will ultimately deify him, even if they happen to kill him first. But if he is simply more supermanly, they may be quite indifferent to him as they would be to another seemingly aimless monstrosity. He must submit to our test even in order to overawe us.(17)

We come now to some of the arguments we find in some of Chesterton's other books, finding passages not as extended as that from Heretics, but persuasive enough against relativism.

In one of these passages he reverts to the theme he used in discussing scepticism in general, the appalling consequences of such a theory:

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(16) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 85.

(17) Ibid.

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> But when people begin to talk about universal relativity, as if everything were as relative as everything else, so that presumably the very notion of relativity is itself relative, only relative to nobody knows what, they are simply knocking the bottom out of the world and the human brain, and leaving a bottomless abyss of bosh.(18)

He has a satire in which he ridicules the relativist by means of a parable, The Disadvantage of Having Two Heads. In it there is a word of advice for the youngsters:

> "My son, the Giant who had one head was stronger than the Giant who had two. When you grow up there will come to you other magicians who will say '"gnothe seauton". Examine your soul, wretched kid. Cultivate a sense of the differentiations possible in a single psychology. Have nineteen religions suitable to different moods.' My son, these will be wicked magicians; they will want to turn you into a two-headed Giant."(19)

Chesterton is particularly concerned with the effect of this relativism as applied to the field of morals:

> The homeless scepticism of our time has reached a subconscious feeling that morality is somehow merely a matter of human taste - an accident of psychology . . . . The modern instinct is that if the heart of man is evil, there is nothing that remains good. But the older feeling was that if the heart of man was ever so evil, there was something that remained good - goodness remained good. An actual avenging virtue existed outside the human race; to that men rose, or from that men fell away. Therefore, of course, this law itself was as much demonstrated in the breach as in the observance . . . . Men spoke of the sinner breaking the law; but it was rather the law that broke him.(20)

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(18) G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, p. 141.

(19) IDEM, The Coloured Lands, p. 48.

(20) IDEM, All Things Considered, pp. 195-196.

A relativist contradicts himself on every side:

> A sort of Theosophist said to me, "Good and evil, truth and falsehood, folly and wisdom are only aspects of the same upward movement of the universe." Even at that stage it occurred to me to ask, "Supposing there is no difference between good and bad, or between false and true, what is the difference between up and down?"(21)

The correct answer to this question of morality is this:

> It is not true that the idea of right and wrong changes. The particular concentration on a certain sort of right changes; the relative toleration of a certain sort of wrong changes. Men in mediaeval times tolerated more ruthless punishment; men in modern times tolerate more reckless and irresponsible financial speculation and control. But a mediaeval man did not think mercy a bad thing. Modern man does not think dishonesty a good thing. The proportions differ in practice; the ethical practice differs in emphasis; but virtue is virtue and vice is vice, in all ages and for all people except the very few lunatics.
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> As it is about cruelty and commercial rapacity, so it is about the basic ideas of modesty and fidelity and sexual self-control. One age does differ from another in manner of expression, and may differ for the better or the worse; but what precisely, what does not really differ is fundamental morality . . . . One egg does differ from another about whether skirts are reasonably long or short; but fashionable skirts are not morality. The motive is morality, even when the motive happens to concern these trivial things."(22)

He sums up his presentation in this categorical statement: "But, anyhow, there is a permanent ethic, and without it nobody will effect even a temporary reform."(23)

In another passage he uncovers what he considers to

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(21) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, p. 158.

(22) IDEM, Come to Think of It, pp. 102-103.

(23) Ibid., p. 104.

be the basic fallacy underlying this theory of relativism in morals:

> The same childish argument is now extended to ordinary morality or decency. It is insisted that, because the decorum of a Roman matron is not exactly the same as that of a Sandwich Islander, therefore there can be no superiority in the one over the other; no possible way of deciding which is the better of the two; and, ultimately, no meaning or value in dignity or propriety at all. The conclusion is so unnatural that, even if the argument were apparently logical, we might be excused for suspecting it of being sophistical. But, as a matter of fact, the argument is not logical enough to be called a sophistry. It is simply transparently untenable; for it rests on the same fallacy; that one man cannot be right because a number of other men are wrong. In this case, of course, it is true that the question is conditioned by different circumstances and that the principle must be applied in different ways. In this case it is true that we cannot say that the whole world is alike, in the sense that we can say that the whole world is round. It is true, but this fashionable argument does not prove it to be true. So far as that argument goes, there might be one costume suitable to all mankind, as there is one custom of washing suitable to all mankind, though some men neglect it and are dirty. All we complain of, in that respect, is that the sceptic always refuses to be a rationalist.(24)

This same kind of thinking appears in the modern attitude of indifferentism with regard to religious belief:

> The vulgar modern argument used against religion, and lately against common decency, would be absolutely fatal . . . . It is perpetually said that because there are a hundred religions claiming to be true, it is therefore impossible that one of them should really be true. The argument would appear on the face of it to be illogical, if any one nowadays troubled about logic. It would be as reasonable to say that because some people thought the earth was flat, and

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(24) G. K. CHESTERTON, <u>All Is Grist</u>, pp. 8-9.

> others (rather less incorrectly) imagined it was round, and because anybody is free to say that it is triangular or hexagonal, or a rhomboid, therefore it has no shape at all; or its shape can never be discovered; and, anyhow, modern science must be wrong in saying it is an oblate spheroid. The world must be in shape, and it must be that shape and no other; and it is not self-evident that nobody can possibly hit on the right one. What so obviously applies to the material shape of the world equally applies to the moral shape of the universe. The man who describes it may not be right; but it is no argument against his rightness that a number of other people must be wrong.(25)

To right the modern situation what is needed, Chesterton ironically states, is "some daring thinker", so daring that:

> He may examine what are called new ideas, and inquire whether they are true ideas; not whether they are as new as they were, in a world where they are bound to grow old. He may ask what Confucius or Aristotle would think about Bolshevism, not merely what Sir William Joynson-Hicks says about Bolshevism . . . .(26)

We should not merely follow fashion, but must have some sort of standard:

> The more you are up with this year's fashion, the more (in a sense) you are already behind next year's. Consequently, in attempting to decide whether an author will, as it is cantly expressed, live, it is necessary to have very firm convictions about what part, if any part, of man is unchangeable. And it is very hard to have this if you have not a religion; or, at least, a dogmatic philosophy.(27)

He repeats this demand and gives an example of what

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(25) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Is Grist, pp. 7-8.

(26) IDEM, Sidelights on New London and Newer York, p. 27.

(27) IDEM, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, p. 206.

he meant above by a dogmatic philosophy:

> There must be some test of truth, that can distinguish the sane from the mad minority. There must be an accepted ethical scheme; as there really was in the minds of the wisest men who founded the democratic experiment in the eighteenth century. Jefferson did not say that anything a majority did was right; he said that any violation of certain God-given rights was wrong.(28)

Classical examples in the field of English literature of writers who stood for moral standards are Shakespeare and Dickens. Of Shakespeare Chesterton says:

> This older and firmer conception of right as existing outside human weakness and without reference to human error, can be felt in the very lightest and loosest of the works of old English literature. It is commonly unmeaning enough to call Shakespeare a great moralist; but, in this way Shakespeare is a very typical moralist. Whenever he alludes to right and wrong it is always with this old implication. Right is right, even if nobody does it. Wrong is wrong, even if everybody is wrong about it.(29)

Dickens wrote a history of England for children and the criticism was made that he applied the same moral standard to all ages. Of this criticism Chesterton says: "Every sane man must do that: a moral standard must remain the same or it is not a moral standard."(30)

The possession of such norms of action inclines the individual to decisive action, a lack of which is attributed to the English people by Chesterton:

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(28) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Resurrection of Rome, p.266.

(29) IDEM, All Things Considered, p. 196.

(30) IDEM, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 165.

> The chief English fault . . . has been lack of decision, not only lack of decision in action, but lack of the equally essential decision in thought - which some call dogma.(31)

As examples of those who do not fall under this condemnation are those writers we have mentioned, Shakespeare and Dickens; specifically exempted also is George Watts, the allegorical painter, who is thus praised for his dogmatic attitude:

> He has the one great certainty which marks off all the great Victorians from those who have come after them: he may not be certain that he is successful, or certain that he is great, or certain that he is good, or certain that he is capable: but he is certain that he is right. It is of course the very element of confidence which has in our day become least common and least possible. We know we are brilliant and distinguished, but we do not know we are right. We swagger in fantastic artistic costumes; we praise ourselves; we fling epigrams right and left; we have the courage to play the egoist and the courage to play the fool, but we have not the courage to preach. If we are to deliver a philosophy it must be in the manner of the late Mr. Whistler and the ridentem dicere verum.(32)

This very cautious way of presenting the truth is not entirely reprehensible, Chesterton goes on, because there are some good elements prompting this attitude: humility, camaraderie, a sense of complexity, some kind of charity. On the other hand, it means: "some loss of courage and of the old and athletic simplicity. Nay, in some sense it is

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(31) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Crimes of England, pp. 72-73.

(32) IDEM, George Frederick Watts, p. 13.

really a loss of a fine pride and self-regard."(33) This is our loss when we try "to avoid the pose of the preacher, to be moral by ironies, to whisper a word and glide away."(34)

It takes courage today to defy the spirit of scepticism or relativism and stand up for the truth: "There is only one thing that it requires real courage to say, and that is a truism."(35)

Chesterton himself, of course, had that very courage of his convictions of which he speaks. This was true of every field of thought in which he was interested, but was most strongly expressed by him in regard to his religious convictions:

> As an apologist I am the reverse of apologetic. So far as a man may be proud of a religion rooted in humility, I am very proud of my religion; I am especially proud of those parts of it that are most commonly called superstition. I am proud of being fettered by antiquated dogmas and enslaved by dead creeds (as my journalistic friends repeat with so much pertinacity), for I know very well that it is the heretical creeds that are dead, and that it is only the reasonable dogma that lives long enough to be called antiquated . . . . I am not over-awed by a young gentleman saying that he cannot submit his intellect to dogma; because I doubt whether he has even used his intellect enough to define dogma.(36)

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(33) G. K. CHESTERTON, George Frederick Watts, p. 14.

(34) Ibid.

(35) Ibid., p. 17.

(36) IDEM, Autobiography, pp. 75-76.

This courage of which we speak is the valor which we named as one of the effects of the virtue of wonder. Dogma is a friend of wonder and valor and an enemy of relativism and vacillation. Chesterton was pleased by Father O'Connor's excogitations on this point:

> One thing I know I was strong about: the utter necessity of certitude. Because one cannot fight to the death for what is susceptible of doubt, and fighting to the death means resisting any temptation, for this is the daily death of self. Ethics? There are no ethics without dogmatics and there's an end. He was much tickled with this, as his early adventures among ethical societies had left him still chuckling.(37)

Thus far we have seen that Chesterton's main argument against relativism and in favor of dogma has been the need of a standard of judgment. Dogma is a light to the mind: "Dogmas are not dark and mysterious; rather dogma is like a flash of lightning - an instantaneous lucidity that opens across a whole landscape."(38) In Alarms and Discursions Chesterton has an essay entitled The Telegraph Poles. The whole point of the essay was that, when lost, he could not find his way by means of the trees, but only by following the line indicated by the telephone poles. The telephone poles were the dogmas.(39) Modern philosophies are a very confusing labyrinth in which to pursue the truth; therefore: "It

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(37) John O'CONNOR, Father Brown on Chesterton, p. 87.

(38) G. K. CHESTERTON, George Bernard Shaw, p. 20.

(39) IDEM, Alarms and Discursions, pp. 21-27.

is necessary to have in hand a truth to judge modern philosophies rapidly; and it is necessary to judge them very rapidly to judge them before they disappear."(40)

Another reason Chesterton offers as a general argument in favor of dogma is that: "dogma means the serious satisfaction of the mind. Dogma does not mean the absence of thought, but the end of thought."(41)

Still another reason is that "dogma is the only thing that makes argument or reasoning possible."(42) We shall say a few words about this a little later on.

It is true, furthermore, that if we want to make any progress in thought, the necessity of dogma is indicated:

> The vice of the modern notion of mental progress is that it is always something concerned with the breaking of bonds, the effacing of boundaries, the casting away of dogmas, But if there be such a thing as mental growth, it must mean the growth into more and more definite convictions, into more and more dogmas. The human brain is a machine for coming to conclusions; if it cannot come to conclusions it is rusty . . . . Man can be defined as an animal that makes dogmas. As he piles doctrine on doctrine and conclusion on conclusion in the formation of some tremendous scheme of philosophy and religion, he is in the only legitimate sense of which the expression is capable, becoming more and more human. When he drops one doctrine after another in a refined scepticism, when he declines to tie himself to a system, when he says that he disbelieves in finality, when, in

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(40) G. K. CHESTERTON, Fancies Versus Fads, p. ix.

(41) IDEM, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 43.

(42) IDEM, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 77.

> his own imagination, he sits as God, holding no form of creed but contemplating all, then he is by that very process sinking slowly backwards into the vagueness of the vagrant animals and the unconsciousness of the grass. Trees have no dogmas. Turnips are singularly broad-minded.
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> If then, I repeat, there is to be mental advance, it must be mental advance in the construction of a definite philosophy of life. And that philosophy of life must be right and the other philosophies wrong.(43)

There is one more point in favor of dogma which our author could have, it seems, developed into a much more extensive deposition. This is the argument that without dogma we are led to the eclipse of satire, comedy, and the spirit of laughter:

> For in a world where everything is ridiculous, nothing can be ridiculed. You cannot unmask a mask; when it is admittedly as hollow as a mask. You cannot turn a thing upside down, if there is no theory about when it is right way up. If life is really so formless that you cannot make head or tail of it, you cannot pull its tail; and you certainly cannot make it stand on its head. Now there is a certain degree of frivolity that becomes formlessness. If the comic writer has not, at the back of his mind, either his own theory of life which he thinks right, or somebody else's theory of life which he thinks wrong, or at least some negative notion that somebody is wrong in thinking it wrong, he has really nothing to write about. He attempts to produce a sort of comedy in which everybody is indifferent to everything and to everybody else; but you cannot create excitement by the collision of several different boredoms. Boredom is dangerously infectious; and has a way of spreading across the footlights. The reason is that there is not in the frivolity any touch of the serious, and therefore none of the satiric. The satirist is no longer set

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(43) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, pp. 285-287.

> down to make fun of a bishop; he is set down all alone in the cold world to make fun of a gaiter. The old aesthetes used to explain that Art is unmoral, rather than immoral. It would be rather truer to say that Art can be immoral, but cannot be unmoral. Unmoral comedy is rapidly ceasing to be comic.(44)

There is little doubt that if Chesterton had so desired, he could have developed this thought into a great defense of the Church as a bulwark for laughter and humor; and could have used it in his presentation of an answer to the problem of evil.

Now there are certain objections to the dogmatic spirit which must be answered. The first is the obvious one which could be raised from the dictionary definition when we look up the word "dogmatic". Webster allies the words connected with dogma to "arrogance", when these words are used in a derogatory sense. Chesterton objects:

> To be dogmatic and to be egotistic are not only not the same thing, they are opposite things. Suppose, for instance, that a vague sceptic eventually joins the Catholic Church. In that act he has at the same moment become less egotistic and become more dogmatic. The dogmatist is by the nature of the case not egotistical, because he believes that there is some solid obvious and objective truth outside him which he has perceived and which he invites all men to perceive. And the egotist is in the majority of cases not dogmatic, because he has no need to isolate one of his notions as being related to truth; all his notions are equally interesting because they are related to him. The true egotist is as much interested in his own errors as in his own truth; the dogmatist is interested only in the truth, and only in the truth because it is true. At the most the dogmatist believes

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(44) G. K. CHESTERTON, Generally Speaking, p. 176.

that he is in the truth; but the egotist believes that the truth, if there is such a thing, is in him.(45)

In this particular essay quoted above, Chesterton is discussing Ruskin, about whose dogmatism he is dilating:

> In so far as Ruskin was dogmatic he was divine. In so far as he was saying that he was right and that all the other people were wrong he was doing what every healthy man ought to do, nay, he was more than healthy; he was humble.(46)

In Heretics Chesterton defends monks and nuns against charges of morbidity and hysteria by arguing that their position of maintaining an ideal or a standard of perfection is "more wholesome" and "jollier"(47) than the negative position of the modern morality, which can only know evil or imperfection.

Another objection to the dogmatic spirit is the charge of bigotry:

> A common hesitation in our day touching the use of extreme convictions is a sort of notion that extreme convictions, especially upon cosmic matters, have been responsible in the past for the thing which is called bigotry. But a very small amount of direct experience will dissipate this view. In real life the people who are most bigoted are the people who have no convictions at all.(48)

Chesterton goes on to give examples of what he means

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(45) G. K. CHESTERTON, A Handful of Authors, pp. 151-152.

(46) Ibid., p. 152.

(47) IDEM, Heretics, pp. 25-26.

(48) Ibid., pp. 294-295.

and then summarizes the whole thing by defining bigotry:

> Bigotry may be roughly defined as the anger of men who have no opinions. It is the resistance offered to definite ideas by that vague bulk of people whose ideas are indefinite to excess. Bigotry may be called the appalling frenzy of the indifferent. This frenzy of the indifferent is in truth a terrible thing; it has made all monstrous and widely pervading persecutions. In this degree it was not the people who cared who were persecuted; the people who cared were not sufficiently numerous. It was the people who did not care who filled the world with fire and oppression. It was the hands of the indifferent that lit the faggots; it was the hands of the indifferent that turned the rack. There have come some persecutions out of the pain of a passionate certainty; but these produced, not bigotry, but fanaticism - a very different and a somewhat admirable thing. Bigotry in the main has always been the pervading omnipotence of those who do not care crushing out those who care in darkness and blood.(49)

Still another objection to the dogmatic spirit is the accusation of fanaticism resulting:

> It is felt by many that strong philosophical conviction, while it does not (as they perceive) produce that sluggish and fundamentally frivolous condition which we call bigotry, does produce a certain concentration, exaggeration, and moral impatience, which we may agree to call fanaticism. They say, in brief, that ideas are dangerous things.(50)

To these indictments our author answers:

> Ideas are dangerous, but the man to whom they are least dangerous is the man of ideas. He is acquainted with ideas, and movesamong them like a lion-tamer. Ideas are dangerous, but the man to whom they are most dangerous is the man of no ideas. The man of no ideas will find the first idea fly to his

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(49) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 296.

(50) Ibid., pp. 296-297.

head like wine to the head of a teetotaler.(51)

It is necessary, he goes on, to have vision and ideals, and this is where the "practical" shallow man fails. The solution to the problem is this:

> Religious and philosophical beliefs are, indeed, as dangerous as fire, and nothing can take from them that beauty of danger. But there is only one way of really guarding ourselves against the excessive danger of them, and that is to be steeped in philosophy and soaked in religion.(52)

In his recapitulation of the answers to the last two arraignments against the man of dogma, he castigates those moderns who too often belittle the place of basic beliefs in the conduct of life:

> Briefly, then, we dismiss the two opposite dangers of bigotry and fanaticism, bigotry which is a too great vagueness and fanaticism which is a too great concentration. We say that the cure for the bigot is belief; we say that the cure for the idealist is ideas. To know the best theories of existence and to choose the best from them (that is, to the best of our own strong conviction) appears to us the proper way to be neither bigot nor fanatic, but something more firm than a bigot and more terrible than a fanatic, a man with a definite opinion. But that definite opinion must in this view begin with the basic matters of human thought, and these must not be dismissed as irrelevant, as religion, for instance, is too often in our days dismissed as irrelevant. Even if we think religion insoluble, we cannot think it irrelevant. Even if we ourselves have no view of the ultimate verities, we must feel that wherever such a view exists in a man it must be more important than anything else in him. The instant that the thing ceases to be the unknowable,

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(51) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 297.

(52) Ibid., pp. 298-299.

it becomes the indispensable.(53)

He goes on to show how the modern man acts with regard to these important matters. The modern has the idea that there is "something narrow or irrelevant or even mean about attacking a man's religion, or arguing from it in matters of politics or ethics."(54) You may not, for instance, argue against trusting the Japanese because they are pagans; but the same people who think this "antiquated or fanatical" will think it perfectly in order to distrust someone because he is a protectionist or socialist or individualist or militarist. These are the type of people who are equivalently saying: "Everything is important with the exception of everything."(55) Our fundamental philosophy of life colors all our efforts:

> We have a general view of existence, whether we like it or not; it alters, or, to speak more accurately, it creates and involves everything we say or do, whether we like it or not. If we regard the Cosmos as a dream, we regard the Fiscal Question as a dream. If we regard the Cosmos as a joke, we regard St. Paul's Cathedral as a joke. If everything is bad, then we must believe (if it be possible) that beer is bad; if everything is good, we are forced to the rather fantastic conclusion that scientific philanthropy is good. Every man in the street must hold a metaphysical system, and hold it firmly. The utmost possibility is that he may have held it so firmly and so long as to have forgotten all about its existence.(56)

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(53) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 299.

(54) Ibid., p. 300.

(55) Ibid., p. 301.

(56) Ibid., pp. 301-302.

This ignorance of their own dogmatism is characteristic of modern men:

> The modern world is filled with men who hold dogmas so strongly that they do not even know that they are dogmas. It may be said even that the modern world, as a corporate body, holds certain dogmas so strongly that it does not know that they are dogmas. It may be thought "dogmatic", for instance, in some circles accounted progressive, to assume the perfection or improvement of man in this world; though that idea of progress is quite as unproved as the idea of immortality, and from a rationalistic point of view quite as improbable. Progress happens to be one of our dogmas, and a dogma means a thing which is not thought dogmatic. Or, again, we see nothing "dogmatic" in the inspiring, but certainly most startling, theory of physical science, that we should collect facts for the sake of facts, even though they seem as useless as sticks and straws.(57)

Put all the dogmas to which a man adheres in one systematic corpus and you have his philosophy of life. Since men are all dogmatists, as Chesterton says, whether they know it or not, it is therefore true:

> that every man carries with him his own life and atmosphere . . . every man carries about with him his own theory of the world. Each one of us is living in a separate Cosmos. The theory of life held by one man never corresponds exactly to that held by another.(58)

Chesterton speaks through the mouth of Father Brown:

> "People will tell you that theories don't matter and that logic and philosophy aren't practical. Don't you believe them. Reason is from God, and when things

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(57) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 302.

(58) G. K. CHESTERTON and J. E. Hodder WILLIAMS, Thomas Carlyle, p. 28.

are unreasonable there is something the matter."(59)

Chesterton insisted on the importance of a philosophy of life and a dogmatic spirit and therefore expressed himself as violently opposed to pragmatism, utilitarianism, or the "practicality" so esteemed in modern society: "If there is one thing I believe in with a solid certainty, it is in discussing the abstract question before what is called the practical question."(60) He gives an example to show the importance of abstractions:

> Civilization is founded upon abstractions. The idea of debt is one which cannot be conveyed by physical motions at all, because it is an abstract idea. And civilization would be nothing without debt. So when hard-headed fellows who study scientific sociology (which does not exist) come and tell you that civilization is material or indifferent to the abstract, just ask yourself how many of the things that make up our Society, the Law, or the Stocks and Shares, or the National Debt, you would be able to convey with your face and your ten fingers by grinning and gesticulating to a German innkeeper.(61)

Chesterton turns the arguments of the pragmatist against the pragmatist himself:

> I agree with the pragmatists that apparent objective truth is not the whole matter; that there is an authoritative need to believe the things that are necessary to the human mind. But I say that one of

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(59) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Secret of Father Brown, p. 226.

(60) IDEM, Generally Speaking, pp. 202-203.

(61) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, p. 192.

> those necessities precisely is a belief in objective truth. The pragmatist tells a man to think what he must think and never mind the Absolute. But precisely one of the things that he must think is the Absolute. This philosophy, indeed, is a kind of verbal paradox. Pragmatism is a matter of human needs; and one of the first of human needs is to be something more than a pragmatist. Extreme pragmatism is just as inhuman as the determinism it so powerfully attacks. The determinist (who, to do him justice, does not pretend to be a human being) makes nonsense of the human sense of actual choice. The pragmatist, who professes to be specially human, makes nonsense of the human sense of actual fact.(62)

The power of ideas is compared in one of the essays to the power of the wind. Trees are visible things; the wind invisible. We know there is a wind because the trees move. The invisible moves the visible.(63) He gives us the example of a revolution:

> No man has ever seen a revolution. Mobs pouring through the palaces, blood pouring down the gutters, the guillotine lifted higher than the throne, a prison in ruins, a people in arms - these things are not revolution, but the results of revolution.
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> You cannot see a wind; you can only see that there is a wind. So also, you cannot see a revolution; you can only see that there is a revolution. And there never has been in the history of the world a real revolution, brutally active and decisive, which was not preceded by unrest and new dogma in the reign of invisible things. All revolutions began by being abstract. Most revolutions began by being quite pedantically abstract.
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> The wind is up above the world before a twig on the tree has moved. So there must always be a battle in the sky before there is a battle on the earth.(64)

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(62) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 64-65.

(63) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, pp. 88ff.

(64) Ibid., p. 91.

The so-called practical man inverts the true situation:

> The great human dogma, then, is that the wind moves the trees. The great human heresy is that the trees move the wind. When people begin to say that the material circumstances have alone created the moral circumstances, then they have prevented all possibility of serious change.(65)

Thinking is the practical thing to do; and Chesterton demonstrates his thesis by another warlike example:

> For I have always thought that thinking was practical; thinking up to the very last moment; thinking in the midst of the battle; thinking when everybody else is supposed to be acting; and thinking more calmly, more carefully, and more justly, the more acute becomes the practical crisis. Battles are not won by the generals saying, "the time has come for action," but by the generals thinking closely and logically about the wisest way to act. Shipwrecks are not avoided by doing something, but by doing the right thing.(66)

In one of the mystery stories we find an example of how practical theory is to the life of the individual; for in this story in the Poet and the Lunatics the doctor suggests a tonic for a man with suicidal tendencies; but the poet, Gabriel Gale, says:

> "What you want is an unpractical man. That is what people always want in the last resort and the worst conditions. What can practical men do here? Waste their practical time in running after the poor fellow and cutting him down from one pub sign after another? Waste their practical lives watching him day and night, to see he doesn't get hold of a rope or a razor? Do you call that practical? You can only forbid him to die. Can you persuade him to

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(65) G. K. CHESTERTON, Tremendous Trifles, p. 92.

(66) IDEM, The End of the Armistice, pp. 53-54.

> live? Believe me, that is where we come in. A man must have his head in the clouds and his wits woolgathering in a fairyland, before he can do anything so practical as that."(67)

Besides being so useful for the life of the individual, theorizing is necessary also for the life of the body politic. State affairs suffer because "politicians have no politics."(68) In an essay in The Common Man Chesterton speaks of the fear people have of philosophy bewildering them and complicating things with long words; but the fact is that: "The business world needs metaphysics - to simplify it."(69) He does not expect his suggestion to be received with open arms; rather will they say that what is needed is a practical man to restore order. But the mind of the practical man being in disorder, he can hardly restore order. He may know what he wants, but he does not know why he wants it:

> And it is the why and the how that have to be considered when we are tracing out the way in which some culture or tradition has got into a tangle. What we need, as the ancients understood, is not a politician who is a business man, but a king who is a philosopher.(70)

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(67) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Poet and the Lunatics, p. 14.

(68) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 118.

(69) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 174.

(70) Ibid., p. 175.

Even when it is not a pressing matter of individual welfare like preventing a suicide or a matter of social welfare like mending the political affairs of a nation, but a very prosaic thing like fixing an automobile or an airplane, Chesterton shows the need for the theorist instead of the practical man:

> The practical man only knows the machine in practice; just as many a man can drive a motor-car who could not mend it, still less design it. The more serious the trouble, the more probable it is that some knowledge of scientific theory will be required; and though the theorist will be called unpractical, he will probably be also indispensable. What is generally meant by a business man is a man who knows the way in which our particular sort of modern business does generally work. It does not follow that he is imaginative enough to suggest something else, when obviously it does not work.(71)

The practical man puts as ends those things which are only means to an end, like service or efficiency:

> What is the matter with the cult of Service is that, like so many modern notions, it is an idolatry of the intermediate, to the oblivion of the ultimate. It is like the jargon of the idiots who talk about Efficiency without any criticism of Effect. The sin of Service is the sin of Satan: that of trying to be first where it can only be second. A word like Service has stolen the sacred capital letter from the thing which it was once supposed to serve. There is a sense in serving God, and an even more disputed sense in serving man; but there is no sense in serving Service. To serve God is at least to serve an ideal being . . . . That ideal has definite and even dogmatic attributes - truth, justice, pity, purity, and the rest. To serve it, however imperfectly, is to

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(71) G. K. CHESTERTON, <u>All Is Grist</u>, p. 20.

serve a particular concept of perfection. But the man who rushes down the street waving his arms and wanting something or somebody to serve, will probably fall into the first bucket-shop or den of thieves and usurers, and be found industriously serving them. There arises the horrible idea that industry, reliability, punctuality, and business activity are good things; that mere readiness to serve the powers of this world is a Christian virtue . . . . But the serious case cannot be stated without once more raising the question of whether mankind ought to serve anything; and of whether they had not better try to define what they intend to serve. All these silly words like Service and Efficiency and Practicality and the rest fail because they worship the means and not the end. But it all comes back to whether we do propose to worship the end; and preferably the right end.(72)

Chesterton maintains that talk about efficiency in your work is not necessarily a sign of vigor and progress:

> When everything about a people is for the time growing weak and ineffective, it begins to talk about efficiency. So it is that when a man's body is a wreck he begins, for the first time, to talk about health. Vigorous organisms talk not about their processes, but about their aims. There cannot be any better proof of the practical efficiency of a nation than that it talks constantly of a journey to the end of the world, a journey to the Judgment Day and the New Jerusalem. There can be no stronger sign of a coarse material health than the tendency to run after high and wild ideals; it is in the first exuberance of infancy that we cry for the moon. None of the strong men in the strong ages would have understood what you meant by working for efficiency. Hildebrand would have said that he was working not for efficiency, but for liberty, equality, and fraternity.(73)

The attitude of the best of pagan civilization was set

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(72) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Thing, pp. 3-4.

(73) IDEM, Heretics, pp. 17-18.

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against pragmatism or utilitarianism:

> We may say that the great Greek ideal was to have no use for useful things. The Slave was he who learned useful things; the Freeman was he who learned useless things. This still remains the ideal of many noble men of science, in the sense that they do desire truth as the great Greeks desired it; and their attitude is an eternal protest against the vulgarity of utilitarianism.(74)

Not to prolong our discussion of Chesterton's comments on utilitarianism, we merely recommend here a chapter in his What's Wrong With the World? which is entitled, Wanted, an Unpractical Man. Here, too, he flays those who call for efficiency because: "It has no philosophy for incidents before they happen . . . . "(75) There is no idealism (in the sense of seeking for ideals). There is no clear conception of aim or end.

The whole point of what we have been discussing in this chapter has been the discussion of that enemy of wonder, scepticism, together with its relatives, idealism, relativism, and pragmatism. There must be dogma in life - and we are not referring only to religious dogma here. There must be a philosophy of life. In order to form such a philosophy of life it is necessary to get down to some earnest thought. The difficulty for the modern is this:

> Now what we observe about the whole current culture

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(74) G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, p. 66.

(75) IDEM, What's Wrong With the World?, p. 12.

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of journalism and general discussion is that people do not know how to begin to think. Not only is their thinking at third or fourth hand, but it always starts about three-quarters of the way through the process. Men do not know where their own thoughts come from. They do not know what their own words imply. They come in at the end of every controversy and know nothing of where it began or what it is all about. They are constantly assuming certain absolutes, which, if correctly defined, would strike even themselves as being not absolutes but absurdities.(76)

The result of this is that:

They are always philosophising and they have no philosophy. They have not reached that reality, that reason of things, or even that fully realised unreason of things, for which they are obviously and indeed avowedly seeking. But, what is here more to the point, they do not (like the old revolutionists) even know the direction in which they are to seek it. They have failed to discover, not only any purpose in the world, but even any purpose in the will. They are witty, brilliant and fashionable bankrupts. They have come to an end; and they have not come to an End.(77)

There must be an end and an End, or else there is no philosophy:

Philosophy is merely thought that has been thought out. It is often a great bore. But man has no alternative, except between being influenced by thought that has been thought out and being influenced by thought that has not been thought out. The latter is what we commonly call culture and enlightenment today. But man is always influenced by thought of some kind, his own or somebody else's; that of somebody he trusts or that of somebody he never heard of, or thought at first, second or third hand; thought from exploded legends or unverified rumours; but always something with the shadow of a system of values

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(76) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Thing, p. 39.

(77) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 199.

and a reason for preference. A man does test everything by something. The question here is whether he has ever tested the test.(78)

The absence of a philosophy in a man's life has disastrous effects on the person:

> The best reason for the revival of philosophy is that unless a man has a philosophy certain horrible things will happen to him. He will be practical; he will be progressive; he will cultivate efficiency; he will trust in evolution; he will do the work that lies nearest; he will devote himself to deeds, not words. Thus struck down by blow after blow of blind stupidity and random fate, he will stagger on to a miserable death with no comfort but a series of catchwords; such as those which I have catalogued above. Those things are simply substitutes for thoughts. In some cases they are the tags and tail-ends of somebody else's thinking. That means that a man who refuses to have his own philosophy will not even have the advantages of a brute beast, and be left to his own instincts. He will only have the used-up scraps of somebody else's philosophy; which the beasts do not have to inherit; hence their happiness. Men have always one of two things: either a complete and conscious philosophy or the unconscious acceptance of the broken bits of some incomplete and shattered and often discredited philosophy.(79)

Every man possessed of the use of reason should, therefore, have a philosophy of life: "every human being is a divinely appointed judge of . . . philosophy."(80) The man who does not possess one is to pitied:

> As we should be genuinely sorry for tramps and paupers who are materially homeless, so we should be sorry for

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(78) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common Man, p. 176.

(79) Ibid., p. 173.

(80) IDEM, Alarms and Discursions, p. 94.

those who are morally homeless, and who suffer a philosophical starvation as deadly as physical starvation.(81)

It is necessary for Chesterton to put his own English nation into the category of those for whom this pity is reserved; for they have the conviction "that the only sort of common-sense is to be found in compromise, and that the only sort of compromise is to be found in confusion."(82)

People who constantly seek compromise as a solution to their difficulties are those who like to call themselves broad-minded; but: "In their own jargon, being broad-minded so often means being blankminded."(83)

Chesterton himself never gloried in this "broad-mindedness." He expresses his feelings about it in one of his novels:

> Murrel smiled rather wearily. "I admit," he said, "that I happen to be able to see both sides of a question. And I suppose you'd say it's done by walking round and round it."
> "I say" she said rising in wrath, "that I never met a man who saw both sides of the question without wanting to clout him on both sides of the head."(84)

His customary attitude is seen in a passage in his book on divorce:

> On this question of divorce I do not profess to be impartial, for I have never perceived an intelligent

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(81) G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, p. 73.

(82) IDEM, What I Saw in America, p. 119.

(83) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 233.

(84) IDEM, The Return of Don Quixote, p. 251.

> meaning in the word. I merely (and most modestly) profess to be right.(85)

The reason he is so boldly standing up for what he believes to be true is explained in an introduction to a book of verse: "But a man should always be ready to say a word for his philosophy; for if it is really a philosophy, it is not merely his."(86) In his excellent commentary on the Book of Job, he further illucidates this attitude:

> Philosophy is either eternal or it is not philosophy. The modern habit of saying, "This is my opinion, but I may be wrong," is entirely irrational. If I say that it may be wrong I say that it is not my opinion. The modern habit of saying, "Every man has a different philosophy; this is my philosophy and it suits me": the habit of saying this is mere weak-mindedness. A cosmic philosophy is not constructed to fit a man; a cosmic philosophy is constructed to fit a cosmos. A man can no more possess a private religion than he can possess a private sun and moon. The first of the intellectual beauties of the Book of Job is that it is all concerned with this desire to know the actuality; the desire to know the actuality; the desire to know what is, and not merely what seems.(87)

This dislike of so-called "broad-mindedness" and the desire for objectivity in the formation of a philosophy does not mean that we must not be fair in our evaluations. The proper fairness is not a common thing, according to Chesterton: "A human being who really tries to be fair is something very like a monster and miracle in the long history of this merry race of ours."(88)

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(85) G. K. CHESTERTON, Divorce Vs. Democracy, p. 5.

(86) IDEM, The Ballad of St. Barbara, p. viii.

(87) IDEM, G. K. C. As M. C., pp. 41-42.

(88) IDEM, The Outline of Sanity, p. 185.

To Chesterton the epitome of fairness was St. Thomas Aquinas:

> Now the Schoolman always had two ideas in his head; if they were only the Yes and No of his own proposition. The Schoolman was not only the schoolmaster but also the schoolboy; he examined himself; he cross-examined himself; he may be said to have heckled himself for hundreds of pages. Nobody can read St. Thomas' theology without hearing all the arguments against St. Thomas' theology. Therefore, even when that sort of faith produced what many would call ferocity, it always produced what I mean here by fairness; the almost involuntary intellectual fairness of one who cannot help knowing that the universe is a many-sided thing. That is precisely the temper of Chaucer; and that is what I mean when I say that he got his broad-mindedness from his theology; though it was not what is now generally meant by a broad theology.(89)

There is a certain type of broad-mindedness which is worthy of approval:

> My idea of broadmindedness is to sympathise with so many of these separate spiritual atmospheres as possible; to respect or love the Buddhists of Tibet or the agnostics of Tooting for their many real virtues and capacities, but to have a philosophy which explains each of them in turn and does not merely generalise from one of them. This I have found in the Catholic philosophy; but that is not the question here, except in so far as there is, I think, just this difference: that the largeness of the other schemes is an unreal largeness of generalisation, whereas the largeness of our scheme is a real largeness of experience.(90)

This "unreal largeness of generalisation" is the reason Chesterton can say: "Nine times out of ten a man's broad-mindedness is necessarily the narrowest thing about him."(91

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(89) G. K. CHESTERTON, Chaucer, pp. 268-269.

(90) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 93.

(91) IDEM, What I Saw in America, p. 281.

We can say, then, in summary of Chesterton's position on this whole matter of broad-mindedness, that what he advocates is a broadness not in our intellectual approach, but a broadness in the sweep of the human will extending respect and charity to all. There can be no broadmindedness in the acceptance or rejection of a conclusion which follows from a major and minor premise which have been proved to be true. This was stoutly held by the Scholastic philosophers:

> The mediaeval man thought in terms of the Thesis, where the modern man thinks in terms of the Essay. It would be unfair, perhaps, to say that the modern man only essays to think - or, in other words, makes a desperate attempt to think. But it would be true to say that the modern man only essays, or attempts, to come to a conclusion. Whereas the mediaeval man hardly thought it worth while to think at all, unless he could come to a conclusion. That is why he took a thing called a Thesis, and proposed to prove it.(92)

The modern man would do well to return to the ways of the Scholastic:

> The Modernists were peculiarly unfortunate when they said that the modern world must not be expected to tolerate the old syllogistic methods of the Schoolmen. They were proposing to scrap the one mediaeval instrument which the modern world will most immediately require . . . . this method of clean-cut deduction, with the definition of the postulates and the actual answering of the question, is something of which the whole of our newspaper-flattered society is in sharp and instant need; as the poisoned are in need of medicine.(93)

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(92) G. K. CHESTERTON, Come to Think of It, pp. 3-4.

(93) IDEM, The Thing, p. 42.

The syllogism is needed for the sake of the conclusion to which it leads, "the actual answering of the question" so much needed:

> What we primarily want just now is not intelligence and many-sidedness, and the turning of things over and over, but some one man, somewhere, who will lay down some one thing and say that he is certain it is true. It is our only chance of emerging into a constructive age, instead of pottering on until the crack of doom in a merely destructive one. If we could take one single common conviction, even if it were only that it is really worth while to keep a Persian cat, we could rebuild civilization and religion.(94)

Even logic itself is not safe from the attacks of the moderns; but these attacks are unwarranted:

> Logic is a machine of the mind, and if it is used honestly it ought to bring out an honest conclusion. When people say that you can prove anything by logic, they are not using words in a fair sense. What they mean is that you can prove anything by bad logic.(95)

We must, in our thinking, begin with the things that do not have to be proved: "Only a man who knows nothing of motors talks of motoring without petrol; only a man who knows nothing of reason talks of reasoning without strong, undisputed first principles."(96)

As we proceed in the reasoning process we must be very careful to define all our terms. Modern thought would not promote definition:

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(94) G. K. CHESTERTON, Lunacy and Letters, p. 37.

(95) IDEM, Varied Types, p. 113.

(96) IDEM, The Innocence of Father Brown, p. 7.

> The religion of the Servile State must have no dogmas or definitions. It cannot afford to have any definitions. For definitions are very dreadful things: they do the two things that most men, especially comfortable men, cannot endure. They fight; and they fight fair.(97)

Those who have dogmas will have definitions: "that inheritance of definition, that goes with an inheritance of dogma."(98)

Definition is necessary for all but the primary terms:

> There are popular expressions which every one uses and no one can explain; which the wise man will accept and reverence, as he reverences desire or darkness or any elemental thing. The prigs of the debating club will demand that he should define his terms. And being a wise man he will flatly refuse. This first inexplicable term is the most important term of all. The word that has no definition is the word that has no substitute.(99)

When you have definitions, you can validly make the proper distinctions to clarify thought:

> For in truth I believe that the only way to say anything definite is to define it, and all definition is by limitation and exclusion; and that the only way to say something distinct is to say something distinguishable; and distinguishable from everything else. In short, a man does not know what he is saying until he knows what he is not saying.(100)

If the moderns are looking for something practical, it would be advantageous for them not to overlook the practical-

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(97) G. K. CHESTERTON, Utopia of Usurers, pp. 35-36.

(98) IDEM, Robert Louis Stevenson, p. 101.

(99) IDEM, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, pp. 3-4.

(100) IDEM, As I Was Saying, p. 18.

ity of definition and distinction:

> I have explained that I believe in drawing distinctions; or what is called splitting hairs. I do not believe in saying breezily that a fungus is pretty much the same as a fungoid, even if you are hungry and in a hurry to have mushrooms for breakfast; or agreeing heartily that a rhombus is the same as a rhomboid, because you have to hustle the geometricians in some plans for housing or surveying. I think the first sort of practicality will probably end with a number of people being poisoned with toadstools, or worse; and the latter with ungeometrical houses falling down on ungeometrical though practical men of action. And I wish to point out that you cannot conduct a policy of pacifism, or of anything else, unless you will consent to distinguish one idea from another; and to find out where your own ideas came from, and with what other ideas they conflict. This weeding of the weaker or wilder ideas out of the mind is simply a practical piece of gardening which applies to any sort of garden . . . . (101)

Besides these examples from every-day living to show the necessity of definition and distinction, we have the testimony of history supporting the practice of the Church in giving an edifying pattern to the world to demonstrate the importance of such exact thinking:

> Theological distinctions are fine, but not thin. In all the mess of modern thoughtlessness that still calls itself modern thought, there is perhaps nothing so stupendously stupid as the common saying,"Religion can never depend on minute disputes about doctrine." It is like saying that life can never depend on minute disputes about medicine. The man who is content to say, "We do not want theologians splitting hairs," will doubtless be content to go and say, "We do not want surgeons splitting filaments more delicate than hairs." It is the fact that many a man would be dead today, if his doctors had not debated fine

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(101) G. K. CHESTERTON, <u>As I Was Saying</u>, pp. 19-20.

> shades about doctoring. It is also the fact that European civilisation would be dead today, if its doctors of divinity had not debated fine shades of doctrine. Nobody will ever write a History of Europe that will make any sort of sense, until he does justice to the Councils of the Church, those vast and yet subtle collaborations for thrashing out a thousand thoughts to find the true thought of the Church. The great religious Councils are far more practical and important than the great international Treaties, which are generally made the pivotal dates of history. Our everyday affairs at this moment are far more affected by Nicaea and Ephesus and Basle and Trent than they are by Utrecht or Amiens or Vienna or Versailles. For in almost every case, the international peace was founded on a compromise; the religious peace was founded on a distinction. It was not a compromise to say that Jesus Christ was Perfect God and Perfect Man; as it was a compromise to say that Dantzig should be partly Polish and partly German. It was the enunciation of a principle, of which the very completeness distinguishes it from the Monophysite on the one side and the Arian on the other. And it has affected, and does still affect, the general state of mind of thousands of Europeans, from admirals to apple-women, who do think (even vaguely) of Christ as . . . human and divine. To ask the apple-woman what are the present practical results for her of the Treaty of Utrecht would be less than fruitful. Now our civilisation is simply made up of these old moral decisions; which many think minute decisions. On the day which ended certain metaphysical disputations about Fate and Freedom it was decided whether Austria should look like Arabia or whether travelling in Spain should be the same as travelling in Morocco.(102)

To condense what Chesterton has to offer by way of further historical example to illustrate the importance of distinction and exact thought, let us just mention the cases he presents. Perhaps the most striking is the verdict of the Church on Iconoclasm; the Church decided against it "and

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(102) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Resurrection of Rome, pp. 70-71.

so produced Statues and the Renaissance".(103) Other examples are the distinction between the honor due to marriage and the honor due to virginity, the distinction between lawful lending and usury, the protection of the principle of private property and the condemnation of its abuse, the distinction between the proper use and the abuse of drink, the defense of marriage and the ban on polygamy, the right of self-defense and the abuse of power, the right to carve statues and the wrong of worshipping them.(104)

The origin of heresies is due to the refusal to admit the distinctions made by the Church. There is in heresies an oversimplification; and this means heresies not only theological, but philosophical:

> That unnatural simplification of everything into one system or another, which we have noted as the fault of the philosopher, revealed at once its finality and its futility. Everything was virtue or everything was happiness or everything was fate or everything was good or everything was bad; anyhow, everything was everything and there was no more to be said; so they said it.(105)

Chesterton gives still other examples of oversimplification leading to unbalanced thought:

> The temptation of the philosophers is simplicity rather than subtlety. They are always attracted

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(103) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Resurrection of Rome, p. 70, (footnote).

(104) Ibid., pp. 71-72.

(105) IDEM, The Everlasting Man, pp. 191-192.

> by insane simplifications . . . . One of these obvious, these too obvious explanations is that everything is a dream and a delusion and there is nothing outside the ego. Another is that all things recur; another, which is said to be Buddhist and is certainly Oriental, is the idea that what is the matter with us is our creation, in the sense of our coloured differentiation and personality, and that nothing will be well till we are again melted into one unity. By this theory, in short, the Creation was the Fall.(106)

We have spoken about the beginnings of thought proceeding from basic self-evident ideas and principles. Another starting-point of heresy, besides the one mentioned above, is the acceptance of some point of view as such a self-evident principle when it is not:

> Since the modern world began in the sixteenth century, nobody's system of philosophy has really corresponded to everybody's sense of reality; to what, if left to themselves, common men would call common sense. Each started with a paradox; a peculiar point of view demanding the sacrifice of what they would call a sane point of view. That is the one thing common to Hobbes and Hegel, to Kant and Bergson, to Berkeley and William James. A man had to believe something that no normal man would believe, if it were suddenly propounded to his simplicity; as that law is above right, or right is outside reason, or things are only as we think them, or everything is relative to a reality that is not there. The modern philosopher claims, like a sort of confidence man, that if once we will grant him this, the rest will be easy; he will straighten out the world if once he is allowed to give this one twist to the mind.(107)

These two explanations of the origin of false philosophical systems which are given by Chesterton quite satis-

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(106) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Everlasting Man, pp. 155-156.

(107) IDEM, St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. 172-173.

factorily cover the ground, therefore, no matter what group of thinkers we are studying.

All heresies, all false philosophies, are attractive to some people because of the half-truths they contain:

> For the true consistent heresies generally look very clear indeed; like Calvinism then or Communism now. They sometimes even look very true; they sometimes even are very true, in the limited sense of a truth that is less than the Truth. They are at once more thin and more brittle than the diamond. For a heresy is not often a mere lie; as Thomas More himself said, "Never was there a heretic that spoke all false." A heresy is a truth that hides all other truths.(108)

He further explains this last idea in another book:

> In the old world they were called heresies. In the modern world they are called fads. Sometimes they are for a time useful; sometimes they are wholly mischievous. But they always consist of undue concentration upon some one truth or half-truth. Thus it is true to insist upon God's knowledge, but heretical to insist on it as Calvin did at the expense of his Love; thus it is true to desire a simple life, but heretical to desire it at the expense of good feeling and good manners. The heretic (who is also the fanatic) is not a man who loves truth too much; no man can love truth too much. The heretic is a man who loves his truth more than truth itself. He prefers the half-truth that he has found to the whole truth which humanity has found. He does not like to see his own precious little paradox merely bound up with twenty truisms into the bundle of the wisdom of the world.(109)

The objection that is most obvious when it comes to dealing with heresies is that it is better to have some of

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(108) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Well and the Shallows, p. 238.

(109) IDEM, The Common Man, pp. 22-23.

the truth than to have none. Maybe we should not be so hard on the heretics, the objector may plead. But Chesterton has this to say to him:

> That a heresy is a half-truth is a very old and familiar example of a whole truth; but a truth that is not often realized as a whole. Most mistaken people mean well, and all mistaken people mean something. There is something to be said for every error, but, whatever may be said for it, the most important thing to be said about it is that it is erroneous. On the principle that half a loaf is better than no verity. But in practice, it is not so much a case of the half loaf of the proverb as of the half apple of the fairy-tale; the apple of which one half was poisoned by the wicked stepmother for the good princess. At least, as modern mental feeding goes, to stop in the middle of the meal is often to eat the poison without eating the antidote. And if we look back on history, we shall see it largely encumbered and crushed with half-truths; we shall . . . be unable to understand how men could sacrifice all other things to each of these things in turn. It may be that we shall never fully understand why our fathers did it, for we certainly do not in the least understand why we do it ourselves.
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> There are certain half-truths that are even now allowed to occupy the whole mind. There are certain statements that are true as far as they go, and even important and interesting as far as they go, which are yet incessantly being used to stop the mind from going any farther.(110)

Chesterton has no mercy, therefore, in his condemnation of falsity in any form or measure. He makes this very clear:

> "I am becoming orthodox," I said, "because I have come, rightly or wrongly, after stretching my brain till it bursts, to the old belief that heresy is worse even than sin; an error is more menacing than crime, for an error begets crimes. An Imperialist is worse than a pirate. For an Imperialist keeps a

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(110) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Is Grist, pp. 78-79.

school for pirates; he teaches piracy disinterestedly and without an adequate salary. A Free Lover is worse than a profligate. For a profligate is serious and reckless even in his shortest love; while a Free Lover is cautious and irresponsible even in his longest devotion. I hate modern doubt because it is dangerous."(111)

Similar ideas are presented by Chesterton through the medium of a fictional character in one of his novels:

"We say that the dangerous criminal is the educated criminal. We say that the most dangerous now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher. Compared to him, burglars and bigamists are essentially moral men; my heart goes out to them. They accept the essential ideal of man; they merely seek it wrongly. Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy the very idea of personal possession. Bigamists respect marriage, or they would not go through the highly ceremonial and even ritualistic formality of bigamy. But philosophers despise marriage as marriage. Murderers respect human life; they merely wish to attain a greater fulness of human life in themselves by the sacrifice of what seems to them to be lesser lives. But philosophershate life itself, their own as much as other people's."

Syme stuck his hands together.

"How true that is," he cried. "I have felt it from boyhood, but could never state the verbal antithesis. The common criminal is a bad man, but at least he is, as it were, a conditional good man. He says that if only a certain obstacle be removed - say a wealthy uncle - he is then prepared to accept the universe and to praise God. He is a reformer, but not an anarchist. He wishes to cleanse the edifice, but not to destroy it. But the evil philosopher is not trying to alter things, but to annihilate them. Yes, the modern world has retained all those parts of police work which are really oppressive and ignominious, the harrying of the poor, the spying upon

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(111) G. K. CHESTERTON, Tremendous Trifles, pp. 272-273.

the unfortunate. It has given up its more dignified work, the punishment of powerful traitors in the State, and powerful heresiarchs in the Church. The modern says we must not punish heretics. My only doubt is whether we have a right to punish anybody else."(112)

These same arguments in favor of the tremendous importance of fixed doctrine Chesterton uses to defend the Church, which, he admits, must admit historically to unfavorable moral developments in the past. He makes another fictional character say:

"The Church in its earthly action has really touched morbid things - tortures and blooding visions and blasts of extermination. The Church has had her madnesses, and I am one of them. I am the massacre of St. Bartholomew. I am the Inquisition of Spain. I do not say that we have never gone mad, but I say that we are fit to act as keepers to our enemies. Massacre is wicked even without provocation. Torture should be violently stopped, though the Church is doing it. But your modern Tolstoy will tell you that it ought not be violently stopped whoever is doing it. In the long run, which is most mad - the Church or the world? Which is madder, the Spanish priest who permitted tyranny, or the Prussian sophist who admired it? Which is madder, the Russian priest who discourages righteous rebellion, or the Russian novelist who forbids it? That is the final and the blasting test. The world left to itself grows wilder than any creed."(113)

Chesterton found the Scholastic philosophy amazingly satisfactory, fulfilling all the requirements he would lay down for adequate system of thought:

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(112) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Man Who Was Thursday, pp. 43-44.

(113) IDEM, The Ball and the Cross, pp. 379-380.

> The Catholic philosophy is a universal philosophy found to fit anywhere with human nature and the nature of things. But even when it does not fit in with human nature it is found in the long run to favour something yet more fitting. It generally suits us, but where it does not suit us we learn to suit it, so long as we are alive enough to learn anything. In the rare cases where a reasonable man can really say that it cuts across his intelligence, it will generally be found that it is true, not only to truth, but even to his deepest instinct for truth.(114)

The fact is that: "We do not really want a religion that is right where we are right. What we want is a religion that is right where we are wrong."(115)

The one who embraces this system of thought

> has for the first time a starting-point for straight and strenuous thinking. He has for the first time a way of testing the truth in any question that he raises. As the world goes, especially at present, it is the other people, the heathen and the heretics, who seem to have every virtue except the power of connected thought. There was indeed a brief period when a small minority did some hard thinking on the heathen or heretical side. It barely lasted from the time of Voltaire to the time of Huxley. It has now entirely disappeared, What is now called free thought is valued, not because it is free thought, but because it is freedom from thought; because it is free thoughtlessness.(116)

This philosophy satisfies Chesterton's demand for definition. The Church behind it has always been most careful in defining terms. He gives the example of the word

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(114) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Catholic Church and Conversion, p. 106.

(115) Ibid., p. 95.

(116) Ibid., p. 86.

"scandal", or "counsel of perfection", or "venial sin", which mean nothing very definite in the newspapers, but "something quite intelligent and interesting in the manuals of moral theology". We have the example, too, of the Mass, "the iron immortality of the Latin Mass. It is not a question between a dead language and a living language, in the sense of an everlasting language. It is a question between a dead language and a dying language; an inevitably degenerating language."(117)

This philosophy, moreover, satisfies Chesterton's demand for a philosophy which is objective:

> Christianity does appeal to a solid truth outside itself; to something which is in that sense external as well as eternal. It does declare that things are really there; or in other words that things are really things. In this Christianity is at one with common sense; but all religious history shows that this common sense perishes except where there is Christianity to preserve it.(118)

This philosophy, which is so satisfactory to Chesterton is not without its appeal to a general audience, an appeal which is growing day by day:

> It is the return of the Thomist Philosophy; which is the philosophy of commonsense, as compared with the paradoxes of Kant and Hegel and the Pragmatists. The Roman religion will be, in the exact sense, the only Rationalistic religion. The other religions will not be Rationalist but Relativist; declaring that reason is itself relative and unreliable;

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(117) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Catholic Church and Conversion, p. 61.

(118) IDEM, The Everlasting Man, p. 155.

> declaring that Being is only Becoming or that all time is only a time of transition; saying in mathematics that two and two make five in the fixed stars, saying in metaphysics and in morals that there is a good beyond good and evil. Instead of the materialist who said that the soul did not exist, we shall have the new mystic who says that the body does not exist. Amid all these things the return of the Scholastic will simply be the return of the sane man . . . . Millions of men are already at least wondering whether this solution is not to be found in the Catholic order and philosophy.(119)

Let us end this particular section of our treatise with some of the advice for action given us by Chesterton. His first advice is to be strong and adhere firmly to our principles:

> So the strict aim, the strong doctrine, may give a little in the actual fight with facts; but that is no reason for beginning with a weak doctrine or a twisted aim. Do not be an opportunist; try to be theoretic at all the opportunities; fate can be trusted to do all the opportunist part of it. Do not try to bend, any more than the trees try to bend. Try to grow straight, and life will bend you.(120)

We should not be intimidated by the fact that, as we should realize, we stand alone:

> Now, I think that those who hold the old view of right should stand firm, stand apart, and even realize they stand alone. They should attack. England looks much more hopeful as a Pagan country calling for conversion than as a Christian country calling for compromise.(121)

He advises a crusade against the paganism and false

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(119) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Well and the Shallows, pp. 193-194.

(120) IDEM, Alarms and Discursions, p. 71.

(121) IDEM, As I Was Saying, p. 34.

philosophies of our day:

> On the other hand, we may admit that, though not a Communist society, it is no longer a Christian society. And then, if we are Christians, we can launch a crusade to convert or conquer it. Now I think, after some sincere thought, that this latter course is by far the better. I do not believe in ignoring the Pagan morals around us; it does not diminish the Paganism; and it only deprives us of the pleasure and advantage of denouncing it as Pagan. The assumption that tradition, and even convention, that virtue and even Victorian virtue, is still the rule, and anything else an exception, is all on the side of the sophists who defend vice. It is a rule by which we carry all the unpopular emblems of power, while they enjoy all the practical fruits of victory. They can flout us, because they profess that there is nothing to conceal; and we cannot fight them, because we pretend that there is nothing to fight. But, above all, from the point of the honest orthodox, the present one-sided truce has this enormous disadvantage: it prevents us from pointing out the one, solid, staring, stupendous fact which is before all our eyes. It is the fact that we have not only seen a modern materialistic civilization rise, but we have seen it fall . . . . It is no longer a question of using the modern machinery; but of cutting loose from the wreck of it.(122)

As to the effectiveness of his advice, we can see its validity demonstrated in two examples he gives us, both from American history. First of all, he points to the dogmatism of the Declaration of Independence:

> The American Constitution . . . is founded on a creed. America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence; perhaps the only piece of practical politics that is also theoretical politics and also great literature. It enunciates that all men are equal in their claim to justice, that governments exist to give them that justice,

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(122) G. K. CHESTERTON, <u>As I Was Saying</u>, pp. 35-36.

> and that their authority is for that reason just. It certainly does condemn anarchism, and it does also by inference condemn atheism, since it clearly names the Creator as the ultimate authority from whom these equal rights are derived. Nobody expects a modern political system to proceed logically in the application of such dogmas, and in the matter of God and Government it is naturally God whose claim is taken more lightly. The point is that there is a creed, if not about divine, at least about human things.(123)

The second example is from the dogmatism of Abraham Lincoln:

> In short, he had a native love of Truth; and, like every man with such a love, he had a natural hatred of mere Tendency. He had no use for progress, for evolution, for going with the stream, for letting the spirit of the age lead him onward. He knew exactly what he thought, not only about the perfection, but the proportion of truth; not only about the direction, but the distance.(124)

We have called scepticism, subjectivism, idealism, and relativism enemies of wonder. We want to add a few remarks to what we said about this at the beginning of this chapter. We have mentioned six integral parts of wonder: observation, enthusiasm, the love of things, religious awe, humility, and childlikeness. The effects of wonder we enumerated were joy, gratitude, camaraderie or democracy, and valor. Chesterton specifically points out how scepticism and its philosophical relatives are enemies of some of these parts or effects of wonder.

As we mentioned before, you cannot reasonably attempt

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(123) G. K. CHESTERTON, What I Saw in America, p. 7.

(124) IDEM, Come To Think of It, p. 239.

serious observation of things which do not exist or do not exist as anything but a projection of your mind.

As for the second element, the element of surprise or enthusiasm, Chesterton connects this necessarily with an objective philosophy:

> That strangeness of things, which is the light in all poetry, and indeed in all art, is really connected with their otherness, or what is called their objectivity. What is subjective must be stale; it is exactly what is objective that is in this imaginative manner strange. In this the great contemplative is the complete contrary of that false contemplative, the mystic who looks only into his own soul, the selfish artist who shrinks from the world and lives only in his own mind. According to St. Thomas, the mind acts freely of itself, but its freedom exactly consists in finding a way out to liberty and the light of day; to reality and the land of the living. In the subjectivist, the pressure of the world forces the imagination inwards. In the Thomist, the energy of the mind forces the imagination outwards, but because images it seeks are real things. All their romance and glamour, so to speak, lies in the fact that they are real things; things not to be found by staring inwards at the mind. The flower is a vision because it is not only a vision. Or, if you will, it is a vision because it is not a dream. This is for the poet the strangeness of stones and trees and solid things; they are strange because they are solid. I am putting it first in the poetical manner, and indeed it needs much more technical subtlety to put it in the philosophical manner.(125)

He does go on in a more philosophical manner to explain the Thomistic diagnosis of our acquisition of knowledge of things, showing the balance evident in the thought of St. Thomas, and then says:

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(125) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 219.

> This is what gives the indefinably virile and even adventurous quality to this view of life; as compared with that which holds that material influences pour in upon an utterly helpless mind, or that which holds that psychological influences pour out and create an entirely baseless phantasmagoria.(126)

The third element in wonder is the love of things. Chesterton says:

> Now, nobody will begin to understand the Thomist philosophy, or indeed the Catholic philosophy, who does not realise that the primary and fundamental part of it is entirely the praise of Life; the praise of Being; the praise of God as the Creator of the World.(127)

He offers Browning as the example of a man who sought a positive and objective philosophy and who had this love:

> Browning was, indeed, a logician, because he was a man and something bigger and better than a poet. He was a logician because a logician is not, as is idly supposed, a frigid person, but a man hot for battle even in the aether of the abstract. A man must have loved much, must have loved God and men and animals, before he can really love even a distinction in terms. Browning loved reasoning as a man loves hunting or fencing or playing leap-frog, because it is an expansion and use of his powers. He had that lost and splendid attitude towards the things of the mind which marked the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. To him scholarship was one of the pleasures of youth; to know and reason was a delight and almost a dissipation.(128)

Asfar as the fourth element of wonder, religious awe, is concerned, it is obvious that this is not for the cynical

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(126) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 221.

(127) Ibid., p. 122.

(128) IDEM, A Handful of Authors, p. 95.

sceptic. The fifth element, humility, is not a notorious virtue of the sceptic, and will be discussed more fully when we examine pride as an enemy of wonder.

The sixth element in wonder is childlikeness. The child is the natural enemy of scepticism:

> A little boy was sitting on my knee the other day while I was reading a new book of philosophy. He could just read capital letters, and he read across the top of a chapter "What is truth?" And the moment he saw this grey and ironical riddle of old Pontius Pilate, he called out in a sudden shrill and exultant voice, "Oh, that is an easy question. I know what truth is. It's saying things right." And so indeed it is; that is the best answer to the Question, except the colossal silence of Christ. But the point is here, that the whole strength of the child lay not in the fact that he solved the difficulty, but that he did not admit that there was any difficulty. That is really to be close to God.(129)

One of the effects of wonder is joy. Skepticism is allied to pessimism, which we shall consider as a special enemy of wonder.

The second effect of wonder is gratitude. We have already mentioned above that the fundamental part of Thomist philosophy, according to Chesterton, is the praise of God. Whom shall the sceptic praise and thank?

The third effect is camaraderie, the spirit of democracy and brotherhood. How an objective and dogmatic philosophy is related to this effect is explained by our author as follows:

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(129) G. K. CHESTERTON, A Handful of Authors, p. 127.

> The truth is that the broad religion creates the narrow clique. It is what is called the religion of dogmas, that is of facts (or alleged facts), that creates a broader brotherhood and brings men of all kinds together. This is called a paradox; but it will be obvious to anyone who considers the nature of a fact. Only a few men commonly share a feeling, when it is only a feeling.(130)

Finally, we have valor as an effect of wonder. The combative spirit, Chesterton points out, is not a natural effect of scepticism:

> I should like to write a book under the general title of the Timid Thinkers. By this term I refer to those who are commonly called the Bold Thinkers. For what strikes me most about the sceptics, who are praised as daring and audacious, is that they dare not carry out any of their acts of audacity . . . . they are afraid; in the sense that they hardly ever venture to complete their own argument . . . . They are emphatically not men who carry a destructive idea through to its logical consequences; they are men who throw it out like a firework, but do not really wait for it to work its full destruction like a bomb . . . . it is easy for a little boy to ring a bell and run away.(131)

Those possessing a solid and dogmatic philosophy, on the other hand, with all its necessary distinctions and definitions, are inclined to valor in fighting for that which they hold to be immutable truth. A conversation in one of the novels sheds light on the spirit of the crusaders for the truth:

> "Murder is a sin," said the immovable Highlander.

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(130) G. K. CHESTERTON, Chaucer, p. 168.

(131) IDEM, Come To Think of It, pp. 141-142.

"There is no sin of bloodshed."

"Well, we won't quarrel about a word," said the other pleasantly.

"Why on earth not?" said MacIan, with a sudden asperity. "Why shouldn't we quarrel about a word? What is the good of words if they aren't important enough to quarrel over? Why do we choose one word more than another if there isn't any difference between them? If you called a woman a chimpanzee instead of an angel, wouldn't there be a quarrel about a word? If you're not going to argue about words, what are you going to argue about? Are you going to convey your meaning to me by moving your ears? The Church and the heresies always used to fight about words, because they are the only things worth fighting about. I say that murder is a sin, and bloodshed is not, and that there is as much difference between those words as there is between 'yes' and the word 'no'; or rather more difference, for 'yes' and 'no', at least, belong to the same catagory. Murder is a spiritual incident. Bloodshed is a physical incident. A surgeon commits bloodshed."

"Ah, you're a casuist!" said the large man, wagging his head.(132)

A little further on, MacIan is still talking to this pacifist:

"Christianity is, as far as you are concerned, a horrible mystery. Keep clear of it, keep silent upon it, as you would upon an abomination. It is a thing that has made men slay and torture each other; and you will never know why. It is a thing that has made men do evil that good might come; and you will never understand the evil, let alone the good."(133)

Meeting with the pacifist merely increases the militant disposition of MacIan:

"But then he came," broke out MacIan, "and my soul said to me: 'Give up fighting, and you will become

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(132) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Ball and the Cross, pp. 95-96.

(133) Ibid., p. 98.

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like that. Give up vows and dogmas, and fixed things, and you may grow like that. You may learn, also, that fog of false philosophy. You may grow fond of that mire of crawling, cowardly morals, and you may come to think a blow bad, because it hurts, and not because it humiliates. You may come to think murder wrong, because it is violent, and not because it is unjust.'"(134)

Thomistic philosophy is of its very nature a philosophy with sword in hand:

> While it is local enough for poetry and larger than any other philosophy, it is also a challenge and a fight. While it is deliberately broadened to embrace every aspect of truth, it is still stiffly embattled against every mode of error. It gets every kind of man to fight for it, it gets every kind of weapon to fight with, it widens its knowledge of the things that are fought for and against with every art of curiosity or sympathy; but it never forgets that it is fighting. It proclaims peace on earth and never forgets why there was war in heaven.(135)

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(134) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Ball and the Cross, p. 101

(135) IDEM, The Everlasting Man, p. 221.

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CHAPTER TEN

THE ENEMIES OF WONDER III-

EVOLUTIONISM AND BELIEF IN "PROGRESS"

Evolutionism, the belief in "progress" being inevitable, and determinism with its denial of free will are blood-relatives of each other and of scepticism and relativism, too.

The modern thinker takes evolution for granted and extends the evolutionary process to fields that lie far beyond the domain of the physical sciences. This type of mentality is easily led into a fatalistic attitude, denying free will and attributing all change to the inevitable influence of heredity and environment.

Chesterton expressed the "status quaestionis" through the mouth of one of his fictional characters:

> "What I complain of is a vague popular philosophy which supposes itself to be scientific when it is really nothing but a sort of new religion and an uncommonly nasty one. When people talked about the fall of man they knew they were talking about a mystery, a thing they didn't understand. Now that they talk about the survival of the fittest they think they do understand it, whereas they have not merely no notion, they have an elaborately false notion of what the words mean. The Darwinian movement has made no difference to mankind, except that, instead of talking unphilosophically about philosophy, they now talk unscientifically about science."(1)

Darwinism spread quickly and was accepted thoroughly

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Club of Queer Trades, p. 236.

as absolute.(2) "It is treated as an answer; and a final and infallible answer."(3)

How this happened historically is described by Chesterton as follows:

> It is not easy for any person who lives in our time, when the dust has settled and the spiritual perspective has been restored, to realise what the entrance of the idea of evolution meant for the men of those days. To us it is a discovery of another link in a chain which, however far we follow it, still stretches back into a divine mystery. To many of the men of that time it would appear from their writings that it was the heartbreaking and desolating discovery of the end and origin of the chain. To them had happened the most black and hopeless catastrophe conceivable to human nature; they had found a logical explanation of all things. To them it seems that an Ape had suddenly risen to gigantic stature and destroyed the seven heavens. It is difficult, no doubt, for us in somewhat subtler days to understand how anybody could suppose that the origin of species had anything to do with the origin of being. To us it appears that to tell a man who asks who made his mind that evolution made it, is like telling a man who asks who rolled a cab-wheel over his leg that revolution rolled it. To state the process is scarcely to state the agent. But the position of those who regarded the opening of the "Descent of Man" as the opening of one of the seals of the last days, is a great deal sounder than people have generally allowed. It has been constantly supposed that they were angry with Darwinism because it appeared to do something or other to the Book of Genesis; but this was a pretext or a fancy. They fundamentally rebelled against Darwinism, not because they had a fear that it would affect Scripture, but because they had a fear, not altogether unreasonable or ill-founded, that it would affect morality. Man had been engaged, through innumerable ages, in a struggle with sin. The evil within him was as strong as he could cope with - it was as powerful as a

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(2) Cf. G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, pp. 194-199

(3) Ibid., p. 197.

> cannonade and as enchanting as a song. But in this struggle he had always had Nature on his side. He might be polluted and agonised, but the flowers were innocent and the hills were strong. All the armoury of life, the spears of the pinewood and the batteries of the lightning, went into battle beside him. Tennyson lived in the hour when, to all mortal appearance, the whole of the physical world deserted to the devil. The universe, governed by violence and death, left man to fight alone, with a handful of myths and memories. Men had not to wander in polluted fields and lift up their eyes to abominable hills. They had to arm themselves against the cruelty of flowers and the crimes of the grass. The first honour surely, is to those who did not faint in the face of that confounding cosmic betrayal; to those who sought and found a new vantage. Of these was Tennyson, and it is surely the more to his honour, since he was the idle lover of beauty of whom we have spoken.(4)

The horrid black cloud over the minds of the people of those times of "the conflict between the apparent artificiality of morals and the apparent immorality of science"(5) has left traces that remain to brood over our own times.

Chesterton not only expresses his disbelief in the conclusions all these moderns have drawn from the teachings of the biological evolutionists, but also loudly proclaims his total disbelief in the foundation of all their doctrines, the evolution of man's body. We number his principal arguments against evolution, taken from various works.(6)

1. It explains development, if anything; but not origin:

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(4) G. K. CHESTERTON and Richard GARNETT, Tennyson, pp. 4-8.

(5) Ibid., p. 10.

(6) His main book on the subject is The Everlasting Man.

> Nobody can imagine how nothing could turn into something. Nobody can get an inch nearer to it by explaining how something could turn into something else . . . . But evolution really is mistaken for explanation. It has the fatal quality of leaving on many minds the impression that they do understand it and everything else; just as many of them live under a sort of illusion that they have read the Origin of Species.(7)

2. The principal evidence is lacking:

> The idea of the Missing Link was not at all new with Darwin; it was not invented merely by those vague but imaginative minor poets to whom we owe most of our ideas about evolution. Men had always played about with the idea of a possible link between human and bestial life; and the very existence - or, if you will, the very non-existence - of the centaur or the mermaid proves it. All the mythologies had dreamed of a half-human monster. The only objection to the centaur and the mermaid was that they could not be found. In every other respect their merits were of the most solid sort. So it is with the Darwinian ideal of a link between man and the brutes. There is no objection to it except that there is no evidence for it. The only objections to the Missing Link is that he is apparently fabulous, like the centaur and the mermaid, all the other images under which man has imagined a bridge between himself and brutality. In short, the only objection to the Missing Link is that he is missing.(8)

Chesterton charges the evolutionists with unfair arguments in this regard. One of the characters in Manalive says:

> "I may perhaps relieve myself of a simple emotion that has been pressing me throughout the proceedings by saying that induction and evolution may go and boil themselves. The Missing Link and all that is

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(7) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Everlasting Man, p. 3.

(8) IDEM, The Uses of Diversity, p. 282.

well enough for kids, but I'm talking about things we know. All we know of the Missing Link is that he is missing - and he won't be missed either. I know all about his human head and horrid tail; they belong to a very old game called 'Heads I win, tails you lose.' If you do find a fellow's bones, it proves he lived a long while ago; if you don't find his bones, it proves how long ago he lived . . . . I suffer from all the disadvantages of being a grown-up person, and I'm jolly well going to get some of the advantages too; and with all politeness I propose not to be bullied with long words instead of short reasons, or consider your business a triumphant progress merely because you're always finding out that you were wrong."(9)

3. There has been no evolution evident in our historical times:

So far from saying that the evolution of man has not finished, they will point out that (as far as we know) it has not begun. In all the five thousand years of recorded history, and in all the prehistoric indications before it, there is not a shadow or suspicion of movement or change in the human biological type. Even evolution, let alone natural selection, is only a conjecture about things unknown, compared with the broad daylight of things known in all thousands of years.(10)

4. History, in fact, seems to disprove evolution:

If the immemorial civilisation of the Near East, so old that it seems always to have been civilised, away from some high standard set for them from the start, I think that tradition is truer to history, as well as philosophy, than most of the half-educated and tenth-rate talk about evolution.(11)

5. Evolutionists fabricate things about primitive man:

The whole thing is one of those impudent insinuations

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(9) G. K. CHESTERTON, Manalive, pp. 364-365.

(10) IDEM, Fancies Versus Fads, pp. 213-214.

(11) IDEM, The Coloured Lands, p. 140.

of popular science, quite unsupported by serious science, but having a very strong moral or anti-moral motive; to suggest by innumerable irresponsible hints that human beings owe everything to semi-human beings called primitive men; and that these were utterly degraded creatures, dwelling in a darkness of hatred and fear.(12)

6. It is not the similarities between man and beast that demand explanation, but the differences:

> If you leave off looking at books about beasts and men, if you begin to look at beasts and men then (if you have any humour or imagination, any sense of the frantic or the farcical) you will observe that the startling thing is not how like man is to the brutes, but how unlike he is. It is the monstrous scale of his divergence that requires an explanation. That man and brute are like is, in a sense, a truism; but that being so like they should then be so insanely unlike, that is the shock and the enigma. That an ape has hands is far less interesting to the philosopher than the fact that having hands he does next to nothing with them; does not play knuckle-bones or the violin; does not carve marble or carve mutton. People talk of barbaric architecture and debased art. But elephants do not build colossal temples of ivory even in a roccoco style; camels do not paint even bad pictures, though equipped with the material of many camel's-hair brushes. Certain modern dreamers say that ants and bees have a society superior to ours. They have, indeed, a civilization; but that very truth only reminds us that it is an inferior civilization. Who ever found an ant-hill decorated with the statues of celebrated ants? Who has seen a bee-hive carved with the images of gorgeous queens of old? No; the chasm between man and other creatures may have a natural explanation, but it is a chasm. We talk of wild animals; but man is the only wild animal. It is man that has broken out. All other animals are tame animals; following the rugged respectability of the tribe or type. All other animals are domestic animals; man alone is ever undomestic, either as a profligate or a monk.(13)

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(12) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common Man, p. 156.

(13) IDEM, Orthodoxy, pp. 266-267.

7. The evolutionist tries to prove a hypothesis with a hypothesis:

> The critic generally says it is unreasonable to expect from the geological record that continuous gradation of types which the challengers of Darwinism demand. He says that only a part of the earth can be examined and that it could not in any case prove so much. This mode of argument involves an amazing oblivion of what is the thing to be proved, and who is trying to prove it. By hypothesis the Darwinians are trying to prove Darwinism. The Anti-Darwinians are not trying to prove anything; except that the Darwinians have not proved it. I do not demand anything in the sense of complaining anything or the absence of anything. I am quite comfortable in a completely mysterious cosmos. I am not reviling the rocks or cursing the eternal hills for not containing these things. I am only saying that these are the things they would have to contain to make me believe something that somebody wants me to believe. These traces are not things that the Anti-Darwinian demands. They are things that the Darwinian requires. The Darwinian requires them in order to convince his opponent of Darwinism; his opponent may be right or wrong, but he cannot be expected to accept the mere absence of them as proof of Darwinism. If the evidences in support of the theory are unfortunately hidden, why then, we do not know whether they were in support of the theory. If the proofs of natural selection are lost, why then, there are no proofs of natural selection and there is an end of it.(14)

8. Gradual development as taught by the evolutionists is not possible because a thing is not fit for use before being finished for use:

> If a thing can fly it may survive, and if it has a wing it may fly; but if it cannot fly with half a wing, why should it survive with half a wing?
> . . . . . .
> Of things serving particular purposes, by a balance and arrangement of parts, it cannot be generally true that they are fit for use before they are finished for use . . . .

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(14) G. K. CHESTERTON, Fancies Versus Fads, pp. 222-223.

> There are monsters who would die instantly if they could not close the holes in their head under water. One supposes they would have died swiftly, before their closing apparatus could develop slowly.(15)

In a set of detective stories, Chesterton satirizes the same evolutionistic idea:

> "I never can see," said Mr. Pond, "how a change, that might have helped an animal if it came quickly, could have helped him if it came slowly. And came to his great-grandchild, long after he ought to have perished without leaving any grandchildren. It might be better if I had three legs, say, in order to stand firmly on two kicking a fellow bureaucrat with the third. It might be better if I had three legs; but it wouldn't be better if I only had a rudimentary leg . . . . I mean that till a leg is long enough to run or climb, it would be only an extra weight for the runner or climber to carry."(16)

9. Intelligibility does not depend on the pace: Chesterton refers to evolutionism as " . . . the silly cult of slowness:"(17)

> An event is not more intrinsically intelligible or unintelligible because of the pace at which it moves. For a man who does not believe in a miracle, a slow miracle would be just as incredible as a swift one . . . . Yet there runs through all the rationalistic treatment of history this curious and confused idea that difficulty is avoided, or even mystery eliminated, by dwelling on mere delay or on something dilatory in the processes of things.(18)

10. A tree is known by its fruits. Evolutionistic teaching

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(15) G. K. CHESTERTON, Fancies Versus Fads, pp. 218-221.

(16) IDEM, The Paradoxes of Mr. Pond, pp. 176-177.

(17) IDEM, The Outline of Sanity, p. 222.

(18) IDEM, The Everlasting Man, p. 4.

has sad repercussions in various fields. One example offered by Chesterton is the development of racism:

> The notion of the negro as something peculiarly perilous or pestilent is not an ancient prejudice but a very recent and largely anthropological fashion. It is akin to all that dates from Darwin; and the popularisation by Huxley of an almost pessimistic type of evolution.(19)

11. The whole idea of evolution is very elusive:

> For the world of science and evolution is far more nameless and elusive and like a dream than the world of poetry or religion; since in the latter images and ideas remain themselves eternally, while it is the whole idea of evolution that identities melt into each other as they do in a nightmare.(20)

12. Evolutionism belittles the dignity of man, which is so intimately bound up with the dogma of the free will of man:

> For ancient Calvinism and modern evolutionism are essentially the same things. They are both ingenious logical blasphemies against the dignity and liberty of the human soul.(21)

This point leads us into the discussion of determinism as treated by Chesterton.

DETERMINISM

The gloomy theories of determinism are all opposed to the glories of wonder. Determinism, like scepticism, kills everything right at the roots. We must simply give up, for

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(19) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common Man, p. 83.

(20) IDEM, The Ball and the Cross, p. 1.

(21) IDEM, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens., p. 186.

what is and will be is inevitable:

> I think that with us the key-word is 'inevitability', or, as I should be inclined to call it, 'impenitence'. We are subconsciously dominated in all departments by the notion that there is no turning back, and it is rooted in materialism and the denial of free will.(22)

There is connected with determinism a sort of subtle pride:

> Now this modern refusal to undo what has been done is not only an intellectual fault; it is a moral fault also. It is not merely our mental inability to understand the mistake we have made. It is also our spiritual refusal to admit that we have made a mistake.(23)

Chesterton did not believe in determinism and was therefore opposed to the extreme conservative:

> The English squire, the ruler of England, has made the one great mistake of supposing that if you leave a thing alone it goes on as before. If you leave a thing alone it goes to the devil.(24)

In another book he tells us that:

> It is vain indeed to speak of conservatism in this world, except as a convenient party label. Unless we are always changing things for the better, they are always changing themselves for the worse.(25)

Our attitude must be that of eternal vigilance:

> We need watchfulness even in Utopia, lest we fall from Utopia as we fell from Eden.
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> We have remarked that one reason offered for being a progressive is that things naturally tend to grow better. But the only reason for being a progressive is that things naturally tend to grow worse.

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(22) G. K. CHESTERTON, Eugenics and Other Evils, p.117.

(23) Ibid., p. 122.

(24) IDEM, G. K. C. As M. C., p. 58.

(25) Ibid.

> The corruption in things is not only the best argument for being progressive; it is also the only argument against being progressive. The conservative theory would really be quite sweeping and unanswerable if it were not for this one fact. But all conservatism is based upon the idea that if you leave things alone you leave them as they are. But you do not. If you leave a thing alone you leave it to a torrent of change. If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must be always painting it again; that is, you must be always having a revolution . . . . An almost unnatural vigilance is really required of the citizen because of the horrible rapidity with which human institutions grow old.(26)

Now, there are two ways in which this determinism of which we have spoken above is manifested. One way is the belief in the "Swing of the Pendulum" as Chesterton calls it, and the other is the belief in an evolutionary and inevitable progress, a sort of false optimism.

With regard to the first-mentioned type of deterministic belief, Chesterton has this to say:

> The whole curse of the last century has been what is called the Swing of the Pendulum; that is, the idea that Man must go alternately from one extreme to the other. It is a shameful and even shocking fancy; it is the denial of the whole dignity of mankind. When Man is alive he stands still. It is only when he is dead that he swings. But whenever one meets modern thinkers (as one often does) progressing towards a madhouse, one always finds, on inquiry, that they have just had a splendid escape from another madhouse. Thus, hundreds of people become Socialists not because they have tried Socialism and found it nice, but because they have tried Individualism and found it particularly nasty. Thus, many embrace Christian Science solely because they are quite sick of heathen science; they are so tired of believing everything is matter that they will even take refuge in the revolting fable

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(26) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 212-213.

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that everything is mind. Man ought to march somewhere. But modern man (in his sick reaction) is ready to march nowhere - so long as it is the Other End of Nowhere.(27)

THE BELIEF IN "PROGRESS"

The second and more important and more widespread sort of deterministic philosophy is the belief in the inevitable progress or foreward movement of mankind. As a typical example of this sort of faith Chesterton offers us the writings of Thackeray:

> Thackeray was a good Victorian radical, who seems to have gone to his grave quite contented with the early Victorian radical theory - the theory which Macaulay preached with unparalleled luminosity and completeness; the theory that true progress goes on so steadily through human history, that while reaction is indefensible, revolution is unnecessary. Thackeray seems to have been quite content to think that the world would grow more and more liberal in the limited sense; that Free Trade would get freer; that ballot boxes would grow more and more secret; that at last (as some satirist of Liberalism puts it) every man would have two votes instead of one. There is no trace in Thackeray of the slightest consciousness that progress could ever change its direction.(28)

What do the moderns mean when they talk of this inevitable "progress". Chesterton says that this is the meaning:

> Every one of the popular modern phrases and ideals is a dodge in order to shirk the problem of what is good . . . . We are fond of talking about "progress";

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(27) G. K. CHESTERTON, Alarms and Discursions, pp. 135-136.

(28) IDEM, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. ix.

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> that is a dodge to avoid discussing what is good . . . . He says, "Away with your old moral formulae; I am for progress." This, logically stated, means, "Let us not settle what is good; but let us settle whether we are getting more of it."(29)

A little further on in the same book he says:

> As enunciated to-day "progress" is simply a comparative of which we have not settled the superlative. We meet every ideal of religion, patriotism, beauty, or brute pleasure with the alternative ideal of progress - that is to say, we meet every proposal of getting something that we know about, with an alternative proposal of getting a great deal more of nobody knows what.(30)

In one place he calls "progress" "providence without purpose."(31) In another he says:

> Now Progress is Providence without God. That is, it is a theory that everything has always perpetually gone right by accident. It is a sort of atheistic optimism, based on an everlasting coincidence far more miraculous than a miracle. If there be no purpose, or if the purpose permits of human free will, then in either case it is almost insanely unlikely that there should be in history a period of steady and uninterrupted progress; or in other words a period in which poor bewildered humanity moves amid a chaos of complications, without making a single mistake.(32)

The modern faith in progress amounts to the worship of youth:

> It is the sceptics who are the sentimentalists. More than half the 'revolt' and the talk of being advanced and progressive is simply a weak sort of snobbishness

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(29) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 33.

(30) Ibid., p. 35.

(31) IDEM, Fancies Versus Fads, p. 249.

(32) IDEM, What I Saw in America, p. 246.

which takes the form of a worship of Youth.(33)

It formulates duties with reference to the future, but is too willing to neglect those with reference to the present:

> In the works of Mr. Wells, and all the typical Utopias and futuristic world-systems of recent times, it is incessantly and impressively repeated that we must live for the Future, for the Young, for the Rising Generation or the Babe Unborn. The traditional obligations of the past are nothing, and even the temporary contracts and compromises of the present are comparatively little; but we really do have a duty to the future generations. While we are kicking our grandfather downstairs, we must take care to be very polite to our great-great-grandson, who is not yet present . . . . (34)

Chesterton is not in favor of this youth-worship:

> Sacrificing everything to the young will be like working only for the rich. They will be a privileged class and the rest will be snobs or slaves. Moreover, the young will always have a fair amount of fun under the worst conditions; if we really wish to console the world, it will be much more rational to console the old.(35)

At any rate, the moderns fail to follow out the logical consequences of their own theory:

> But if we present precisely the same idea, in a present and practical form, it is called antiquated. Its practical form is called Marriage or the Family. It really does demand that a man and a woman should live largely for the next generation. It does demand that they should, to some extent, defer their personal amusements, such as divorce and dissipation,

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(33) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Thing, p. 45.

(34) IDEM, All Is Grist, p. 171.

(35) IDEM, The Thing, p. 45.

for the benefit of the next generation. And whenever we suggest that, a wail goes up about the wickedness and cruelty of depriving the poor dear parents of the innocent gaities of divorce.(36)

The trouble is that: "Fashion is called progress. Every new fashion is called a new faith. Every faith is a faith which offers everything except faithfulness."(37) What is needed instead are standards, principles, direction, an end, an idea of what is good. We need standards:

> If everything changes, including the mind of man, how can we tell whether any change is an improvement or no? . . . . Now, nobody can possibly say which of these . . . evolutionary changes is the better, unless he keeps some standard that cannot be changed . . . . On this principle we may be able to say of the future that it will be a change. But we cannot say it will be an improvement; for that implies that there will always be something in common between us and our descendants; something that we are all trying to improve. Why should that something not change like everything? Is that outside the laws of evolution? Is that a special creation? Is that a miracle? Is that common standard of conscience a thing of divine origin? Dreadful thought!(38)

We need principle: " . . . progress ought to be based on principle, while our modern progress is mostly based on precedent."(39) We need direction:

For progress by its very name indicates a direction;

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(36) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Is Grist, p. 172.

(37) IDEM, The New Jerusalem, pp. 73-74.

(38) IDEM, Come to Think of It, pp. 153-156.

(39) IDEM, What's Wrong With the World?, p. 247.

> and the moment we are in the least doubtful about the direction, we become in the same degree doubtful about the progress. Never perhaps since the beginning of the world has there been an age that had less right to use the word "progress" than we. In the Catholic twelfth century, in the philosophic eighteenth century, the direction may have been a good or a bad one, men may have differed more or less about how far they went, and in what direction, but about the direction they did in the main agree, and consequently they had the genuine sensation of progress. But it is precisely about the direction that we disagree. Whether the future excellence lies in more law or less law, in more liberty or less liberty; whether property will be finally concentrated or finally cut up; whether sexual passion will reach its sanest in an almost virgin intellectualism or in a full animal freedom; whether we should love everybody with Tolstoy, or spare nobody with Nietszche; - these are the things about which we are actually fighting most. It is not merely true that this age which has settled least what is progress is this "progressive" age. It is, moreover, true that the people who have settled least what is progress are the most "progressive" people in it. The ordinary mass, the men who have never troubled about progress, might be trusted perhaps to progress. The particular individuals who talk about progress would certainly fly to the four winds of heaven when the pistol-shot started the race. I do not, therefore, say that the word "progress" is unmeaning; I say it is unmeaning without the previous definition of a moral doctrine, and that it can only be applied to groups of persons who hold that doctrine in common. Progress is not an illegitimate word, but it is logically evident that it is illegitimate for us. It is a sacred word, a word which could only rightly be used by rigid believers and in the ages of faith.(40)

We need an end to aim at:

> True progress consists in looking for the place where we can stop.(41)

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(40) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, pp. 36-37.

(41) IDEM, Fancies Versus Fads, p. 193.

> Personally I prefer to call it reform. For reform implies form. It implies that we are trying to shape the world in a particular image; to make it something that we see already in our minds . . . . it means that we see a certain thing out of shape and we mean to put it into shape. And we know what shape . . . . Progress should mean that we are always changing the world to suit the vision. Progress does not mean (just now) that we are always changing the vision.(42)

Of these "progressive" people who are so aimless Chesterton says:

> If they could express themselves clearly, they would either say that the journey is itself the goal, or else that the journey is hopeless and only an illusion makes it hopeful. Otherwise, they are out on a tramp that has no end, to find an inn that has no existence.(43)

We need to have a proper concept of what is good:

> We are so accustomed, in modern times, to think in terms of what we call progress, that we seldom admit, except in a poetical parenthesis, that there is such a thing as a perfect moment which is better than what comes after, as wellas better than what went before.(44)

Knowing this perfect moment is the best help toward progress in the true sense: "Culture is not only knowing the best that has been said: it is also knowing the best that has been done, and even doing our best to do it."(45)

In order to attain to this sense of direction and this

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(42) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 194-195.

(43) IDEM, Chaucer, p. 150.

(44) IDEM, Foreword to Giotto, the Legend of St. Francis by Edith M. Cowles, p. 13.

(45) IDEM, G. K. C. As M. C., p. 234.

idea of a goal toward which we extend our efforts, we must first have humility:

> We could purchase hope at the dreadful price of humility. But all thinkers and writers, of all political parties and philosophical sects, seem to shrink from this notion of admitting they are on the wrong road and getting back on to the right one.(46)

Men somehow have the idea that mankind as such is infallible: "There was only one supreme modern mistake, which was that men forgot for a hundred years that they are liable to make mistakes."(47) As one of Chesterton's fictional characters says: "'There is really a certain talent in unmaking mistakes.'"(48) Just because a thing is modern doesn't necessarily mean it is better:

> Modernity is only the moment of time in which we happen to find ourselves, and nobody who thinks will suppose that it is bound to be superior, either to the time that comes after it or to the time that went before.(49)

The fact is that it means chaos to cling to this idea that there is only this natural "progress" on which to rely:

> Now, if this merely cloudy and boneless development be adopted as a philosophy, then there can be no place for the past and no possibility of a complete culture. Anything may be here today and gone tomorrow; even tomorrow. But I do not accept that ever-

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(46) G. K. CHESTERTON, Fancies Versus Fads, p. 249.

(47) IDEM, As I Was Saying, p. 126.

(48) IDEM, The Man Who Knew Too Much, p. 59.

(49) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 165.

lasting evolution, which merely means everlasting chaos. As I only accept the organic and orderly development of a thing according to its own design and nature, there is for me such a thing as a human culture that is reasonably complete. Only the modern, advanced, progressive scientific culture is unreasonably incomplete.(50)

The blind reliance on "progress" is a thing that itself stops progress:

It is the mark of such thoughts that they stop us from thinking. The man who has thus praised progress does not think it necessary to progress any further. The man who has dismissed a complaint, as being old, does not himself think it necessary to say anything new. He is content to repeat this apology for existing things; and seems unable to offer any more thoughts on the subject.(51)

Before this evolutionary progress came to be the customary tenet of modernistic faith:

The old reformers and the old despots alike desired definite things, powers, licenses, payments, vetoes, and permissions. Only the modern progressive and the modern conservative have been content with two words.(52)

What do the facts of the matter show with regard to this claim of the inevitable progress of mankind?

There is no way the world is going. There never was. The world is not going anywhere, in the sense of the old optimistic progressives . . . . The world is what the saints and the prophets saw it was; it is not merely getting better or merely getting worse; there is one thing that the world does; it wobbles.

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(50) G. K. CHESTERTON, Avowals and Denials, pp. 25-26.

(51) IDEM, The Outline of Sanity, p. 21.

(52) IDEM, George Bernard Shaw, p. 61.

> Left to itself, it does not get anywhere; though if helped by real reformers of the right religion and philosophy, it may get better in many respects, and sometimes for considerable periods. But in itself it is not a progress; it is not even a process; it is the fashion of this world that passeth away. Life in itself is not a ladder; it is a see-saw.(53)

We cannot trust man to do the right thing inevitably in the long run:

> There is one little defect about Man, the image of God, the wonder of the world and the paragon of animals; that he is not to be trusted. If you identify him with some ideal, which you choose to think is his inmost nature or his only goal, the day will come when he will suddenly seem to you a traitor.(54)

Chesterton gives examples to show how in some cases the world turns back instead of progressing:

> Psychoanalysis resurrected the archaic interpreter of dreams, just as Psychical Research resurrected the ancient necromancer or professional raiser of ghosts. We often read about the modern world as mocking the superstitions of the past, even of the immediate past; but almost the exact opposite is the truth. A number of things are taken seriously now that would only have been mocked a hundred years ago . . . . (55)

One thing which Chesterton feels certain the modern world has not progressed in is its intellectual aptitude:

> I believe there is infinitely less of this intellectual attention to an argument than there used to be . . . . The minds of our fathers may have been occupied in futile and pedantic hair-splitting, but their minds

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(53) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Well and the Shallows, p.33.

(54) Ibid., p. 34.

(55) IDEM, Avowals and Denials, p. 127.

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were really capable of splitting a hair. It may be more cosy to be stunned with a blow on the head by a club than to have one of your hairs split by a needle, but it is not any better tribute to the quality of your head, or of anybody else's.(56)

This is not to be considered an intellectual age:

One way of putting it is that this is a psychological age, which is the opposite of an intellectual age. It is not a question of persuading men, but of suggesting how they are persuaded. It is an age of Suggestion: that is, of appeal to the irrational part of man.(57)

Chesterton, who was known as a "mediaevalist" by some, says what we would expect him to say about that time in history:

It was an age of progress. It was perhaps the one real age of progress in all history. Men have seldom moved with such rapidity and such unity from barbarism to civilisation as they did from the end of the Dark Ages to the times of the universities and the parliaments, the cathedrals and the guilds. Up to a certain point we may say that everything, at whatever stage of improvement, was full of the promise of improvement. Then something began to go wrong, almost equally rapidly, and the glory of this great culture is not so much in what it did as in what it might have done.(58)

If we want to make true progress in our day, it is not enough to be constantly appealing to some vague ideal of progress which will surely take place in the future:

The final objection to it is that it amounts to this:

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(56) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Is Grist, pp. 28-29.

(57) Ibid., p. 31.

(58) IDEM, The New Jerusalem, p. 245.

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> say anything, however idiotic, and you are in advance of your age. This kind of stuff must be stopped. The sort of democrat who appeals to the babe unborn must be classed with the sort of aristocrat who appeals to his deceased great-grandfather. Both should be sharply reminded that they are appealing to individuals whom they well know to be at a disadvantage in the matter of prompt and witty reply.(59)

It amounts to a superstition:

> For their superstition is an inversion of the ancestor-worship of China; and instead of vainly appealing to something that is dead, they appeal to something that may never be born.(60)

On the other hand, Chesterton warns against an excessive conservative or reactionary attitude:

> A Reactionary is one in whom weariness itself has become a form of energy. He is one in whom even boredom boils and ferments at last by its own stagnation; and he acts not only with impatience but with the accumulated power of patience. He often acts very rightly; but it is his temptation to think that anything that was conveniently right is necessarily wrong. He deals too much in associations and too little in distinctions. He sees too much in social symbols; like the nineteenth century rebels who wore trousers because old-fashioned people wore knee-breeches; and then wore knee-breeches because old-fashioned people wore trousers. He tends too much to class all the features of an epoch together, and to date them rather than define them. And even when he is right, there is always a danger that what was really good in the previous society may be destroyed by what is good in the new one.(61)

There is a proper respect for history and tradition which is necessary for making real progress:

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(59) G. K. CHESTERTON, George Bernard Shaw, p. 239.

(60) IDEM, What I Saw in America, p. 177.

(61) IDEM, The Resurrection of Rome, pp. 247-248.

> In my innocent and ardent youth I had a fixed fancy. I held that children in a school ought to be taught history, and ought to be taught nothing else. The story of human society is the only fundamental framework outside of religion in which everything can fall into its place. A boy cannot see the importance of Latin simply by learning Latin. But he might see it by learning the history of the Latins . . . . History is simply humanity. And history will humanise all studies, even anthropology.(62)

Chesterton goes on to explain that his enthusiasm for this proposed method of education was diminished by his more mature discovery of the lack of true history in many histories.(63) Nevertheless, it is still true that the lack of historical knowledge results in

> those who are largely out of touch with the present, through being entirely out of touch with the past. For a man without history is almost in the literal sense half-witted. He is only in command of a part even of his own mind. He does not know what half his words mean, and what half his own actions signify.(64)

Such a man is not à complete human being:

> A complete human being ought to have all these things stratified in him, so long as they are in the right order of importance, and that man should be a prince looking down from the pinnacle of a tower built by his fathers, and not a contemptuous cad, perpetually kicking down the ladders by which he climbed.(65)

The man who has no respect for history is one who

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(62) G. K. CHESTERTON, Lunacy and Letters, p. 128.

(63) Ibid.

(64) IDEM, The Glass Walking-Stick, pp. 134-135.

(65) IDEM, Avowals and Denials, p. 86.

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tends " . . . to think that because something has satisfied generations of men it must be untrue."(66) He is the type of person who derides those who "live in the past":

> We talk of people living in the past; and it is commonly applied to old people or old-fashioned people. But, in fact, we all live in the past, because there is nothing else to live in. To live in the present is like proposing to sit on a pin. It is too minute, it is too slight a support, it is too uncomfortable a posture, and it is of necessity followed immediately by totally different experiences, analogous to those of jumping up with a yell. To live in the future is a contradiction in terms. The future is dead; in the perfectly definite sense that it is not alive. It has no nature, no form, no feature, no vaguest character of any kind except what we choose to project upon it from the past. People talk about the dead past; but the past is not in the least dead, in the sense in which the future is dead. The past can move and excite us, the past can be loved and hated, the past consists largely of lives that can be considered in their completion; that is, literally in the fulness of life. But nobody knows anything about any living thing in the future, except what he chooses to make up, by his own imagination, out of what he regrets in the past, or what he desires in the present. Anyone of the Utopias, or visions of the future, such as were written by Wells or William Morris or Bellamy or any number of others, is simply a patchwork of the past.(67)

If you want to make progress, you must build on the past:

> When there really is anything like the building of a new civilisation, it means that there has been a great deal of quarrying in the ruins of the old civilisation. When there is only a false start, a half-built farmhouse, a half-baked culture and

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(66) G. K. CHESTERTON, George Bernard Shaw, p. 186.

(67) IDEM, Avowals and Denials, pp. 198-199.

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bankruptcy, it means that the reformers have tried to simplify life too much; they have left behind them all that they wanted most.(68)

As far as the actual ignorance of history in our modern times is concerned, Chesterton points to the recent past as the most neglected field of knowledge:

> The most dangerous gap in general knowledge is the gap in the minds of most men about what happened to their own fathers. They often know rather more about what happened to their grandfathers, and much more about what happened to their great-grandfathers.(69)

Respect for history means respect for tradition:

> Tradition does not mean a dead town; it does not mean that the living are dead but that the dead are alive. It means that it still matters what Penn did two hundred years ago or what Franklin did a hundred years ago; I never could feel in New York that it mattered what anybody did an hour ago.(70)

What is the reason for this lack of respect for history and tradition?

> The whole position is based on this idea that we have got all the good that can be got out of the ideas of the past. But we have not got all the good out of them, perhaps at this moment not any of the good out of them. And the need here is a need of complete freedom for restoration as well as revolution.(71)

We have to be very careful in our efforts to make progress not to be hasty in relegating to the scrap heap the

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(68) G. K. CHESTERTON, Avowals and Denials, p. 195.

(69) Ibid., p. 199.

(70) IDEM, What I Saw in America, p. 70.

(71) IDEM, What's Wrong With the World?, p. 40.

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institutions of the past. In one essay Chesterton gives the example of removing a fence. If a person does not understand why the fence is there, he makes an error in removing it. It is only after he understands why it is there that he properly makes his decision as to whether to remove it or not.

> It is extremely probable that we have overlooked some whole aspect of the question, if something set up by human beings like ourselves seems to be entirely meaningless and mysterious.(72)

A striking historical example is given by Chesterton to illustrate the fact that the person who clings to the past may in many circumstances be the truly progressive person and the real reformer:

> Above all it may sometimes happen that the highest task of a thinking citizen may be to do the exact opposite of the work which the Radicals had to do. It may be his highest duty to cling on to every scrap of the past that he can find, if he feels that the ground is giving way beneath him and sinking into mere savagery and forgetfulness of human culture. This was exactly the position of all thinking men in what we call the dark ages, say from the sixth to the tenth century. The cheap progressive view of history can never make head or tail of that epoch; it was an epoch upside down. We think of the old things as barbaric and the new things as enlightened. In that age all the enlightened things were old; the barbaric and brutally ignorant things were new and up to date. Republicanism was a fading legend; despotism was a new and successful experiment. Christianity was not only better than the clans that rebelled against it; Christianity was more rationalistic than they were. When men looked back they saw progress and reason; when they looked forward they saw shapeless tradition and tribal terror. Touching such an age it is obvious

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(72). G. K. CHESTERTON, The Thing, p. 27.

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> that all our modern terms describing reform or conservation are foolish and beside the mark. The Conservative was then the only possible reformer. If a man did not strengthen the remains of Roman order and the root of Roman Christianity, he was simply helping the world to roll downhill into ruin and idiotcy.(73)

In order for there to exist true progress there must be spiritual progress along with material progress: "unless the soul improves with time there is no guarantee that the accumulations of experience will be adequately used."(74) "'It does not suffice to have progress in the science; one must have it also in the sentiment of human justice.'"(75)

Chesterton was not impressed by the hustle and the material progress in America; he considered it, in fact, a sign of the lack of ideas and of a certain simplicity:

> At bottom they have a simple conservatism - so simple that it does not even know it is conservative. It has hardly realized how much hustle is identical with routine . . . . The notion that America is advanced only shows how deceptive is the mask of machinery and materialistic science. As a historical fact, those who have been advanced in their machinery have generally not been advanced in their ideas . . . . If it comes to thinking, to questioning, to the use or abuse of speculation . . . . No people have done it less than the American people.(76)

In his novel, The Ball and the Cross Chesterton has

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(73) G. K. CHESTERTON, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, pp. 163-164.

(74) IDEM, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 32.

(75) IDEM, Tremendous Trifles, p. 230.

(76) IDEM, Generally Speaking, pp. 62-63.

one of his characters discuss true progress. He dilates on the impossibility of free thought being an aid to progress and then goes on to say:

> "No; there are only two things that really progress; and they both accept accumulations of authority. They . . . have steadily advanced in a certain definable direction; they are the only two things, it seems, that ever can progress. The first is strictly physical science. The second is the Catholic Church . . . . I say that if you want an example of anything which has progressed in the moral world by the same method as science in the material world, by continually adding to without unsettling what was there before, then I say that there is only one example of it."(77)

The Church is progressive because it has the fixed standard, the ideal, the end, that Chesterton stated as necessary prerequisites for progress.(78) The Church has also an energy to accomplish its tasks - an energy that is more than natural.(79) "'We do not want, as the newspapers say, a Church that will move with the world. We want a Church that will move the world.'"(80)

We have called this evolutionism or belief in the slogan of "progress" an enemy of wonder. Material progress is in itself no guarantee of wonder:

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(77) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Ball and the Cross, pp. 146-147.

(78) Cf. IDEM, Orthodoxy, pp. 211 ff.

(79) Cf. Ibid., pp. 275-276.

(80) G. K. CHESTERTON quoted in Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 468.

> There has certainly been a rush of discovery, a rapid series of inventions; and, in one sense, the activity is marvellous and the rapidity might well look like magic. But it has been a rapidity in things going stale; a rush downhill to the flat and dreary world of the prosaic; a haste of marvellous things to lose their marvellous character; a deluge of wonders to destroy wonder. This may be the improvement of machinery, but it cannot possibly be the improvement of man. And since it is not the improvement of man, it cannot possibly be progress. Man is the creature that progress professes to improve; it is not a race of wheels against wheels, or a wrestling match of engines against engines. Improvement implies all that is commonly called education; and education implies enlargement; and especially enlargement of the imagination. It implies exactly that imaginative intensity of appreciation which does not permit anything that might be vivid or significant to become trivial or vulgar.(81)

The doctrine of "progress" or evolutionism is evidently opposed to that element in wonder which we have called enthusiasm, because, as Chesterton says: "What happens when everyone is asleep is called Evolution. What happens when everyone is awake is called Revolution."(82)

It is also opposed to the love of things:

> We have said we must be fond of this world, even in order to change it. We now add that we must be fond of another world (real or imaginery) in order to have something to change it to.(83)

It is opposed to the element of humility:

> The mere necessitarian will always be narrow; for such a man will really be working upon the insane notion, or obsession, that he is necessary.

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(81) G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, p. 183.

(82) IDEM, Utopia of Usurers, p. 46.

(83) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 194.

> It is the root of all religion that a man knows that he is nothing in order to thank God for something.(84)

This last quotation above shows how this belief in the inevitability or necessity of progress is not conducive to gratitude, one of the effects of wonder. Neither is it conducive to valor, another effect. It is not bold to be a Futurist:

> The creed . . . consists ultimately in this statement: that it is bold and spirited to appeal to the future. Now, it is entirely weak and half-witted to appeal to the future. A brave man ought to ask for what he wants, not for what he expects to get. A brave man who wants atheism in the future calls himself an Atheist; a brave man who wants Socialism, a Socialist; a brave man who wants Catholicism, a Catholic. But a weak-minded man who does not know what he wants in the future calls himself a Futurist.(85)

Chesterton says that: " . . . this cult of the future is not only a weakness but a cowardice of the age."(86) It is sometimes advertised as boldness:

> We often read nowadays of the valor or audacity with which some rebel attacks a hoary tyranny or an antiquated superstition. There is not really any courage at all in attacking hoary or antiquated things, any more than in offering to fight one's grandmother. 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 from the past. He cares as little for what will be as for

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(84) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Resurrection of Rome, p. 88.

(85) IDEM, Alarms and Discursions, pp. 104-105.

(86) IDEM, What's Wrong With the World?, p. 30.

what has been; he cares only for what ought to be.(87)

There is still another reason why cowardice enters in; there is a real fear of the past:

> And the upshot of this modern attitude is really this: that men invent new ideals because they dare not attempt old ideals. They look forward with enthusiasm, because they are afraid to look back.(88)

A COROLLARY ABOUT EDUCATION

Our whole view of the various aspects of life is colored by our fundamental philosophy. So the fact that we are sceptics, relativists, evolutionists, dogmatists or Scholastics will make a difference in our viewpoint on education.

Chesterton points out that in our time " . . . earnest philosophers are really doubting whether it is right to teach anybody anything; even how to avoid taking poison or falling off precipices."(89) This is the result of scepticism.

The schooling recommended by the scholastic educator is at direct odds to this sort of vague instruction; and the Dewey type of educator is horrified by scholastic education:

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(87) G. K. CHESTERTON, What's Wrong With the World?, p. 40.

(88) Ibid., p. 34.

(89) IDEM, All I Survey, p. 195.

For instance, he assumes that the mediaeval idea of education was inferior to ours, simply because it involved the teaching of a positive philosophy. But there is something to be said for the idea of teaching everything to somebody, as compared with the modern notion of teaching nothing, and the same sort of nothing, to everybody. For what we force on all families, by the power of the police, is not a philosophy but the art of reading and writing unphilosophically.(90)

These modern educators argue from the etymology of the word "education". Chesterton answers:

I know all about the word education meaning drawing things out, and mere instruction meaning putting things in. And I respectfully reply that God alone knows what there is to draw out; but we can be reasonably responsible for what we are ourselves putting in.(91)

We must, therefore, in our educative processes put something into the child; and this something must be what we are convinced is the truth. The sceptics and the relativists cannot do this:

Such people are especially shrinking from that awful and ancestral responsibility to which our fathers committed us when they took the wild step of becoming men. I mean the responsibility of affirming the truth of our human tradition and handing it on with a voice of authority, an unshaken voice. That is the one eternal education; to be sure enough that something is true that you dare to tell it to a child. From this high audacious duty the moderns are fleeing on every side; and the only excuse for them is (of course,) that their modern philosophies are so half-baked and hypothetical that they cannot convince themselves enough to convince even a newborn babe.(92)

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(90) G. K. CHESTERTON, All I Survey, p. 59.

(91) IDEM, Fancies Versus Fads, p. 165.

(92) IDEM, What's Wrong With the World?, pp. 212-213.

These modern educators who do not believe in indoctrinating the student cannot even call their process education; they miss the main fact about education:

> Of course, the main fact about education is that there is no such thing. It does not exist, as theology or soldiering exist. Theology is a word like geology, soldiering is a word like soldering; these sciences may be healthy or no as hobbies; but they deal with stone and kettles, with definite things. But education is not a word like geology or kettles. Education is a word like "transmission" or "inheritance"; it is not an object, but a method. It must mean the conveying of certain facts, views or qualities, to the last baby born. They might be the most trivial facts or the most preposterous views or the most offensive qualities; but if they are handed on from one generation to another they are education . . . . It is giving something - perhaps poison. Education is tradition, and tradition (as its name implies) can be treason.(93)

What is it that teachers, whether they be teachers of good or of evil, have in common?

> The truth is, that there is nothing in common at all between these teachers, except that they teach. In short, the only thing they share is the one thing they profess to dislike: the general idea of authority. It is quaint that people talk of separating dogma from education. It is education. A teacher who is not dogmatic is simply a teacher who is not teaching.(94)

In order to educate properly, then, we must be dogmatists, we cannot be sceptics:

> The fashionable fallacy is that by education we can give people something that we have not got . . . . we can produce something splendid by accident . . . . they seem somehow to think that things can get into the

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(93) G. K. CHESTERTON, What's Wrong With the World?, pp. 201-203.

(94) Ibid., p. 204.

> heads of the children which were not in the heads of the parents, or, indeed, anywhere else . . . . Education is only truth in a state of transmission; and how can we pass on truth if it has never come into our hand?(95)

In reply to the argument of those whom we have mentioned before, - those who argue that education is drawing out the potentialities of the child,-Chesterton gives this droll example:

> You may indeed "draw out" squeals and grunts from the child by simply poking him and pulling him about, a pleasant but cruel pastime to which many psychologists are addicted. But you will wait and watch very patiently indeed before you draw the English language out of him. That you have got to put into him; and there is an end of the matter.(96)

The conclusion, then, is all against the sceptic and relativist education:

> All educationists are utterly dogmatic and authoritarian. You cannot have free education; for if you left a child free you would not educate him at all.(97)

In showing that this dogmatic education means a giving of standards and ideals to the pupil, Chesterton gives at the same time an excellent presentation of the case for liberal education:

> I mean that to train the citizen is to train a critic.

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(95) G. K. CHESTERTON, What's Wrong With the World?, pp. 205-207.

(96) Ibid., p. 209.

(97) Ibid., p. 218.

The whole point of education is that it should give a man abstract and eternal standards, by which he can judge material and fugitive conditions. If the citizen is to be a reformer, he must start with some ideal which he does not obtain by gazing reverently at the unreformed institutions. And if any one asks, as so many are asking: "What is the use of my son learning all about Ancient Athens and remote China and mediaeval guilds and monasteries, and all sorts of dead or distant things, when he is going to be a superior scientific plumber in Pimlico?" the answer is obvious enough. "The use of it is that he may have some power of comparison, which will not only prevent him from supposing that Pimlico covers the whole planet, but also enable him, while doing full credit to the beauties and virtues of Pimlico, to point out that, here and there, as revealed by alternative experiments, even Pimlico may conceal somewhere a defect."

Now, the nuisance of all this notion of Business Education, of a training for certain trades, whether of plumber or plutocrat, is that they will prevent the intelligence being sufficiently active to criticize trade and business properly. They begin by stuffing the child, not with the sense of justice by which he can judge the world, but with the sense of inevitable doom or dedication by which he must accept that particular very worldly aspect of the world . . . . it narrows the mind whereas the whole object of education is to broaden the mind and especially to broaden it so as to enable it to criticize and condemn such narrowness. Everybody ought to learn first a general view of the history of man, of the nature of man, and (as I, for one, should add) of the nature of God. This may enable him to consider the rights and wrongs of slavery in a slave community, of cannibalism in a cannibal community, or of commerce in a commercial community. If he is immediately initiated into the mysteries of these institutions themselves, if he is sworn in infancy to take them seriously as they take themselves, if he becomes a trader not only before he becomes a traveller, but even before he becomes a true citizen of his own town, he will never be able to denounce those institutions - or even improve them. Such a state will never have the ideas or imagination to reform itself; and hustle and bustle and business activity will have resulted in the dead fixity of a fossil.(98)

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(98) G. K. CHESTERTON, Selected Essays, pp. 238-240.

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Finally, now we can conclude our whole section on scepticism, relativism, evolutionism, the enemies of wonder; and show how education, which we have demonstrated must be dogmatic, should be an instrument in the hands of those who would battle against these foes and strike a blow for wonder:

> For my part, I should be inclined to suggest that the chief object of education should be to restore simplicity. If you like to put it so, the chief object of education is to unlearn things. The chief object of education is to unlearn all the weariness and wickedness of the world and to get back into that state of exhilaration we all instinctively celebrate when we write by preference of children and of boys. If I were an examiner appointed to examine all examiners . . . I would not only ask the teachers how much knowledge they had imparted; I would ask them how much splendid and scornful ignorance they had erected, like some royal tower in arms. But, in any case, I would insist that people should have so much simplicity as would enable them to see things suddenly and to see things as they are.(99)

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(99) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Things Considered, p. 53.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ENEMIES OF WONDER IV -

PRIDE

Humility is one of the elements of wonder. Pride is the opposed vice and therefore is an enemy of wonder.

We have discussed scepticism, relativism, subjectivism, idealism, and called these, too, enemies of wonder. They are, according to Chesterton, intimately connected with the vice of pride.

A conversation in one of his detective stories carries out this idea; Gabriel Gale is speaking:

> "The dreadful doubts are not the doubts of the materialist. The dreadful doubts, the deadly and damnable doubts, are the doubts of the idealist."
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> "I always imagined you were an idealist," said Garth.
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> "I use the word idealist in its philosophical sense. I mean the real sceptic who doubts matter and the minds of others and everything except his own ego. I have been through it myself; as I have been through nearly every form of infernal idiocy. That is the only use I am in the world; having been every kind of idiot. But believe me, the worst and the most miserable sort of idiot is he who seems to create and contain all things. Man is a creature; all his happiness consists in being a creature; or, as the Great Voice commanded us, in becoming a child."
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> . . . . . .
>
> "I also dreamed that I had dreamed of the whole creation. I had given myself the stars for a gift; I had handed myself the sun and moon. I had been behind and at the beginning of all things; and without me nothing was made that was made. Anybody who has been in that centre of the cosmos knows that it is to be in hell."(1)

(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Poet and the Lunatics, pp.103-104.

The next and last chapter of this monograph on wonder is to be devoted to the problem of evil; in it we shall quote the sentences that follow those we have just cited to show the connection between idealism and pride; and those ensuing passages will show physical evil as an answer to both.

In Orthodoxy Chesterton carries on the thought that idealism is connected with pride:

> This horrible fancy has in it something decidedly attractive to the somewhat mystical egoism of our day. That publisher who thought that men would get on if they believed in themselves, those seekers after the Superman who are always looking for him in the looking-glass, those writers who talk about impressing their personalities instead of creating life for the world, all these people have really only an inch between them and this awful emptiness.(2)

Not only those men mentioned here, but the modern man in general is subject to the most varied temptations to the vice of pride:

> Indeed, a great deal of modern literature and ethics might be meant specially for the encouragement of spiritual pride. Scores of scribes and sages are busy writing about the importance of self-culture and self-realisation; about how every child is to be taught to develop his personality (whatever that may be); about how every man must devote himself to success, and every successful man must devote himself to developing a magnetic and compelling personality; about how every man may become a superman (by taking Our Correspondence Course) or, in the more sophisticated and artistic type of fiction, how one specially superior superman can learn to look down on the mere mob of ordinary supermen, who form the population of

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(2) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, p. 45.

that peculiar world. Modern theory, as a whole, is rather encouraging egoism.(3)

The phraseology of our times and culture does not recognize pride nor its opposite virtue:

> It has learnt for instance, to use the phrase "Inferiority Complex" to describe what Christians used to call Modesty and gentlemen good manners. But if you stop somebody who has just used the phrase "Inferiority Complex", and ask him whether there is such a thing as "Superiority Complex", he will gape and gobble and gurgle unmeaning sounds and his legs will give way beneath him . . . . But the much older and much more profound Psychology of the Christian Religion was grounded on the very ancient discovery that a superiority complex was the beginning of all evil.(4)

Besides the classes of men that Chesterton mentioned in The Common Man, he singles out other groups as especially prone to the vice of pride. One of these is the philanthropist group:

> The trouble with the philanthropist is not that he does not love all men moderately, but rather that he generally loves one man too well . . . . I am tempted to recommend him to try being a man-hater, that men may more easily love him . . . . But do not be kind merely to exhibit your own kindness; for that is an insult that is never forgiven. When you are helping people, pray for a spirit of humility; I had almost said, when you are helping them, pray for an appearance of helplessness.(5)

Another type open to temptations to snobbery is the up to date man, the modernist:

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(3) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common Man, pp. 250-251.

(4) IDEM, Sidelights on New London and Newer York, pp. 55-56.

(5) Ibid., p. 4.

> The real objection to modernism is simply that it is a form of snobbishness. It is an attempt to crush a rational opponent not by reason, but by some mystery of superiority, by hinting that one is specially up to date or particularly "in the know". To flaunt the fact that we have had all the last books from Germany is simply vulgar; like flaunting the fact that we have had all the last bonnets from Paris. To introduce into philosophical discussions a sneer at a creed's antiquity is like introducing a sneer at a lady's age. It is caddish because it is irrelevant. The pure modernist is merely a snob; he cannot bear to be a month behind the fashion.(6)

Those without religion entirely are also subjects of this vice, for with them " . . . the supernatural has been slain by the supercilious."(7)

Even in what are supposed to be religious groups we find the disposition to pride; this is especially true of the esoteric groups, like the Theosophists, whom Chesterton singles out for criticism:

> It is certainly true, I am afraid, whatever the failure in charity, that I did dislike some Theosophists. . . . I disliked them because they had shiny pebbly eyes and patient smiles. Their patience mostly consisted of waiting for others to rise to the spiritual plane where they themselves already stood. It is a curious fact, that they never seemed to hope that they might evolve and reach the plane where their honest green-grocer already stood.(8)

He relates pride and secrecy: "For in spiritual pride

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(6) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Things Considered, p. 5.

(7) IDEM, Alarms and Discursions, p. 76.

(8) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 147.

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there is always an element of secrecy and solitude."(9)

Besides the esoteric religionists, another group with secrecy and pride is the congregation of leading powers in modern society, for they must hide away their mistakes:

> Our mistakes have become our secrets. Editors and journalists tear up with a guilty air all that reminds them of the party promises unfulfilled, or the party ideals reproaching them. It is true of our statesmen . . . that socially in evidence they are intellectually in hiding. The society is heavy with unconfessed sin . . . . There are many things it has done and allowed to be done which it does not really dare to think about; it calls them by other names and tries to talk itself into faith in a false past, as men make up the things they would have said in a quarrel.(10)

We should admit our mistakes: "'Every man makes mistakes; they say a man who never makes mistakes never makes anything else.'"(11)

Allied to this kind of secrecy is the silence of the egoist:

> It is my experience that the egoist, or, at least, the really evil and poisonous sort of egoist, is not remarkable for talking a great deal about himself; or, indeed, for talking at all. The worst examples of the egoistic type are silent and watchful, and wait until they can say something which (as they think, and as others may probably think) nobody could have said but themselves. But even when they do talk at large, it is not in the ordinary sense about themselves. They are much more likely to talk about a large number of different things, to show how wise

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(9) G. K. CHESTERTON, Eugenics and Other Evils, p. 123.

(10) Ibid., p. 123.

(11) IDEM, The Return of Don Quixote, p. 78.

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and wisely cultivated they are. Above all, the true egoist can generally be detected by this diabolic mark: that he is not only willing to talk on any subject, but on any side of any subject. He has no creed, no cause, no conception of truth which he thinks more important than himself. . . . In all his varied travels he has discovered all wonders except one most wonderful thing - something bigger than himself.

Now, simple and sincere men, however much they may seem to be talking about themselves, are almost always using their own experiences to illustrate something bigger and better . . . . Now, to the egoist, the whole pleasure is in the experience, because they are egoistic experiences but, in all subtle and deep-seated cases, the more he enjoys them as experiences, the less he is likely merely to narrate them in an egoistic way. He cares far too much about the impression he is creating; he does not want to be remembered, as the dogmatist is, as the man who talked at the top of his voice, or a man who talked all the time. That sort of error can only be made by a person who still retains a great deal of unconsciousness. And it is the point of the true egoist that he retains nothing but self-consciousness. We say in rebuke to the rude and shouting dogmatist, "You forget yourself." The rebuke is the supreme compliment.

It is recognized that egoism is akin to hysteria, and is nonetheless hysterical because it is calm or dignified or apparently restrained. It lies very near that mystery of unreason and untruth which the old mystics perhaps simplified too much in their stories of diabolism, but which the modern psychologists will never fully understand till they take that old mysticism into account. In popular language, there is in such a man something of a madman, of a quiet and unobtrusive madman, and, as is so often said of the madman, he can be very cunning. He will try strangely circuitous ways of emphasizing his ego; not generally the obvious and hearty way of talking about himself. He is just as likely to call attention to himself by not talkingas by talking. He is liable to utter refusals, generally without giving reasons; because the refusal is more of an event if the reason is a mystery. The other type, the talker and debater, would be sure to give the reason for the refusal; for, to the combative, controversial man, the reason is more important than the refusal.(12)

(12) G. K. CHESTERTON, Come to Think of It, pp. 66-69.

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Everything the egoist does is measured by vanity:

> It is that condition in which the victim does a thousand varying things from one unvarying motive of a devouring vanity; and sulks or smiles, slanders or praises, conspires and intrigues or sits still and does nothing, all in one unsleeping vigilance over the social effect of one single person.(13)

Certainly these descriptions of the egoist are so classical that on their evidence alone Chesterton could be adjudged an expert practical psychologist.

Although Chesterton by no means puts Catholics into this classification of those who as a group are inclined to the vice of pride, he still issues a warning that in the modern world there is the temptation to it:

> The great temptation of the Catholic in the modern world is the temptation to intellectual pride. It is so obvious that most of his critics are talking without in the least knowing what they are talking about, that he is sometimes a little provoked towards the very un-Christian logic of answering a fool according to his folly. He is a little bit disposed to luxuriate in secret, as it were, over the much greater subtlety and richness of the philosophy he inherits; and only answer a bewildered barbarian so as to bewilder him still more. He is tempted to ironical agreements or even to disguising himself as a dunce.(14)

This temptation must be crushed:

> It is a temptation to be resisted . . . . We are not entitled to despair of explaining the truth; nor is it really so horribly difficult to explain. The real difficulty is not so much that the critic is crude as

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(13) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Common-Man, p. 251.

(14) IDEM, The Thing, p. 131.

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that we ourselves are not always clear, even in our own minds, far less in our public expositions.(15)

There is still another group mentioned by Chesterton that is susceptible to the fatal inroads of pride; and this is due to their fundamental doctrines:

> The essence of Calvinism was certainty about salvation; the essence of Catholicism is uncertainty about salvation. The modern and materialised form of that certainty is superiority; the belief of a man in a fixed moral aristocracy of men like himself. But the truth concerned here is that, by this time at any rate, the superiority has become a doctrine as well as an indulgence. I doubt if this extreme school of Protestants believe in Christian humility even as an ideal. I doubt whether the more honest of them would even profess to believe in it. This can be clearly seen by comparing it with other Christian virtues; of which this decayed Calvinism offers at least a version, even to those who think it a perversion. Puritanism is a version of purity; if we think it a parody of purity. Philanthropy is a version of charity; if we think it a parody of charity. But in all this commercial Protestantism there is no version of humility; there is not even a parody of humility. Humility is not an ideal. Humility is not even a hypocrisy. There is no institution, no commandment, no common form of words, no popular pattern or traditional tale, to tell anybody in any fashion that there is any such thing as a peril of spiritual pride. In short, there is here a school of thought and sentiment that does definitely regard self-satisfaction as a strength; as against the strong Christian tradition . . . that does as definitely regard it as a weakness.(16)

As far as the pagans are concerned, Chesterton traces our problems today to paganism and equates this with pride:

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(15) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Thing, pp. 132-133.

(16) IDEM, Irish Impressions, pp. 204-205.

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> Christendom, which is the only philosophical name of Europe, has been confronted in these last days with exactly the same problem which confronted it in its first days. It is loosely called the problem of Paganism; but, when reduced to its realities, it will almost always be found . . . to be the problem of Pride. It was largely common both to the noble and the ignoble Pagans.(17)

There is good reason for Chesterton's attitude because there was no conception of humility as a virtue among the pagans:

> The greatest of the Christian doctors were the first to admit that most of the Christian virtues had been heathen virtues. They only claimed that Christianity could alone really inspire a heathen to observe the heathen virtues. It is unjust to say that no heathens were ever just. For that matter, there were heathen nuns and heathen vows of chastity; as in the Vestals or the cult of Diana. Upon one point and one point only, was there really a moral revolution that broke the back of human history. And that was upon the point of Humility. There was this definite thing about the best Pagan; that in him dignity did mean pride. It was a change that stood alone; and was worthy to stand alone. For it was the greatest psychological discovery that man has made, since man has sought to know himself.
>
> It was the stupendous truth that man does not know anything, until he cannot only know himself but ignore himself. He must subtract himself from the study of any solid and objective thing. As Swift profoundly said, the very definition of Honour is "to suppose the question not your own." Vanity which is a pleasure, is a perfectly legitimate pleasure like wine. But Pride, which is the falsification of fact, by the introduction of self, is the enduring blunder of mankind. Christianity would be justified if it had done nothing but begin by detecting that blunder. Now at this moment that blunder is boiling up again on every side of us in Christendom and threatening to whelm it again in barbarism.(18)

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(17) G. K. CHESTERTON, The End of the Armistice, p. 217.

(18) Ibid., pp. 217-219.

The truth of the claim that humility was a "discovery" may be seen by a perusal of the Ethics of that greatest of the pagan thinkers, Aristotle. Such a study will bring the reader to the same conclusion drawn by one of Chesterton's fictional characters: "'Aristotle, so far as I can understand, makes out the magnanimous man to be a pretty conceited fellow.'"(19)

Chesterton offers a reason for the absence of humility in paganism. He thinks it is because the secure are humble; and the pagans could not be secure because their gods were capricious and indifferent. Christians can be humble because they are secure.(20)

We turn now from the consideration of the vice of pride to the more positive side, the virtue of humility.

We said in our chapter on scepticism that we would have more to offer on the connection between scepticism and our present subject. Chesterton speaks of the dislocation of virtues in our modern world:

> What we suffer from to-day is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert - himself. The part he

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(19) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Return of Don Quixote, p. 57.

(20) IDEM, The Defendant, pp. 132-133.

doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt - the Divine Reason. Huxley preached a humility content to learn from Nature. But the new sceptic is so humble that he doubts if he can ever learn. Thus we should be wrong if we had said hastily that there is no humility typical of our time. The truth is that there is a real humility typical of our time; but it so happens that it is practically a more poisonous humility than the wildest prostrations of the ascetic. The old humility was a spur that prevented a man from stopping; not a nail in his boot that prevented him from going on. For the old humility made a man doubtful about his efforts, which might make him work harder. But the new humility makes a man doubtful about his aims, which will make him stop working altogether.

At any street corner we may meet a man who utters the frantic and blasphemous statement that he may be wrong. Every day one comes across somebody who says that of course his view may not be the right one. Of course his view must be the right one, or it is not his view. We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table. We are in danger of seeing philosophers who doubt the law of gravity as being a mere fancy of their own. Scoffers of old time were too proud to be convinced; but these are too humble to be convinced. The meek do inherit the earth; but the modern sceptics are too meek even to claim their inheritance. It is exactly this intellectual helplessness which is our . . . problem.(21)

There is a second type of false humility which is mentioned by Chesterton:

There runs a strange law through the length of human history - that men are continually tending to undervalue their environment, to undervalue their happiness, to undervalue themselves. The great sin of mankind, the sin typified by the fall of Adam, is the tendency, not towards pride, but towards this weird and horrible humility.(22)

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(21) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 55-56.

(22) IDEM, The Defendant, p. 13.

How did Chesterton define humility - true humility? In one place he says: "humility is akin to truth";(23) and in another he gives an elaborate descriptive definition:

> Humility is the luxurious art of reducing ourselves to a point, not to a small thing or a large one, but to a thing with no size at all, so that to it all the cosmic things are what they really are - of immeasurable stature.(24)

By this definition we can see how intimately connected humility is with wonder in the mind of Chesterton.

In another place Chesterton, using the word "modesty", speaks of humility as "the balance between mere pride and mere prostration."(25)

He draws some slight distinction between humility and the Latin "verecundia", of which he says:

> There has always been something common to civilized men, whether they called it being merely a citizen; or being merely a sinner. There has always been something which your ancestors called Verecundia; which is at once humility and dignity. . . . We do not praise ourselves solely because nobody else will praise us.(26)

Chesterton explains the "golden mean" we find in humility:

> In one way Man was to be haughtier than he had ever

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(23) G. K. CHESTERTON, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 216.

(24) IDEM, The Defendant, p. 136.

(25) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 172.

(26) IDEM, Letters to an Old Garibaldian, p. 46.

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> been before; in another way he was to be humbler than he had ever been before. 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. All humility that had meant pessimism, that had meant man taking a vague or mean view of his whole destiny - all that was to go . . . . Man was a statue of God walking about the garden, man had pre-eminence over all the brutes; man was only sad because he was not a beast, but a broken god. The Greek had spoken of men creeping on the earth, as if clinging to it. Now Man was to tread on the earth as if to subdue it.(27)

And here is the other balancing feature that produces the mean:

> When one came to think of one's self, there was vista and void enough for any amount of bleak abnegation and bitter truth. There the realistic gentleman could let himself go - as long as he let himself go at himself. There was an open playground for the happy pessimist. Let him say anything against himself short of blaspheming the original aim of his being; let him call himself a fool . . . ; but he must not say that fools are not worth saving. He must not say that a man, qua man, can be valueless. Here, again in short, Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious. The Church was positive on both points. One can hardly think too little of one's self. One can hardly think too much of one's soul.(28)

The effects of humility mentioned by Chesterton are the following:

1. It fosters the magnanimous viewpoint. "'Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak.'"(29)

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(27) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, p. 173.

(28) Ibid., p. 174.

(29) IDEM, The Innocence of Father Brown, p. 255.

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2. It is conducive to learning, for by it we become docile:

> Humility is a permanent necessity as a condition of effort and self-examination. It is one of the deadly fallacies of Jingo politics that a nation is stronger for despising other nations. As a matter of fact, the strongest nations are those . . . which . . . have not been too proud to sit at the feet of the foreigner and learn everything from him. Almost every obvious and direct victory has been the victory of the plagiarist.(30)

3. It is conducive to true progress:

> I do not know by what extraordinary mental accident modern writers so constantly connect the idea of progress with the idea of independent thinking. Progress is obviously the antithesis of independent thinking. For under independent or individualistic thinking, every man starts at the beginning, and goes, in all probability, just as far as his father before him. But if there really be anything of the nature of progress, it must mean, above all things, the careful study and assumption of the whole of the past.(31)

What is the reason for the success of the humble man? How is it that the humble man does big things and does them boldly? Chesterton gives his explanation:

> It is the humble man who has the sensational sights vouchsafed to him, and this for three obvious reasons: first, that he strains his eyes more than any other men to see them; second, that he is more overwhelmed and uplifted with them when they come; third, that he records them more exactly and sincerely and with less adulteration from his more common-place and more conceited everyday self.(32)

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(30) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 165.

(31) Ibid., p. 170.

(32) Ibid., p. 74.

A problem arises in this connection. How can you reconcile the true spirit of humility with an aspiration for great works? Is this not hypocrisy? Here is Chesterton's answer:

> The truth is that there is no more conscious inconsistency between the humility of a Christian and the rapacity of a Christian than there is between the humility of a lover and the rapacity of a lover. The truth is that there are no things for which men will make such herculean efforts as the things of which they know they are unworthy. There never was a man in love who did not declare that, if he strained every nerve to breaking, he was going to have his desire. And there never was a man in love who did not declare also that he ought not to have it. The whole secret of the practical success of Christendom lies in the Christian humility, however imperfectly fulfilled. For with the removal of all question of merit or payment, the soul is suddenly released for incredible voyages. If we ask a sane man how much he merits, his mind shrinks instinctively and instantaneously. It is doubtful whether he merits six feet of earth. But if you ask him what he can conquer - he can conquer the stars. Thus comes the thing called Romance, a purely Christian product.(33)

And yet this attitude is sadly misunderstood:

> And this gay humility, this holding of ourselves lightly and yet ready for an infinity of unmerited triumphs, this secret is so simple that every one has supposed that it must be something quite sinister and mysterious. Humility is so practical a virtue that men think it must be a vice. Humility is so successful that it is mistaken for pride . . . . In a word, the failure of this virtue actually lies in its success; it is too successful as an investment to be believed in as a virtue. Humility is not merely too good for this world; it is too practical for this world; I had almost said it is too worldly for this world.(34)

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(33) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, pp. 69-70.

(34) Ibid., pp. 70-71.

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The success of humility and the failure of pride is sung by Chesterton in a poem:

> Pride flings frail palaces at the sky,
> As a man flings up sand,
> But the firm feet of humility
> Take hold of heavy land.
>
> Pride juggles with her toppling towers,
> They strike the sun and cease,
> But the firm feet of humility
> They grip the ground like trees.(35)

For examples of humility Chesterton of course calls attention to this virtue in the two saints whose biographies he wrote, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thomas Aquinas. But the greatest example of all is Christ:

> Outrushing the fall of man
> Is the height of the fall of God.(36)

Now we turn to the explanation of the antagonism between pride and wonder. It is evident that there is a direct opposition between pride and that part of wonder called humility; but pride is also opposed to the other parts.

The first part of wonder is observation. In writing about Matthew Arnold, Chesterton has occasion to show how humility is linked with observation and wonder in general:

> He discovered . . . the purely intellectual importance of humility. He had none of that hot humility which is the fascination of saints and good men. But he had a cold humility which he had discovered to be a

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(35) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Ballad of the White Horse, p. 84.

(36) IDEM, Gloria in Profundis, p. 3.

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> mere essential of the intelligence. To see things clearly, he said, you must "get yourself out of the way." The weakness of pride lies after all in this; that oneself is a window. It can be a coloured window, if you will; but the more thickly you lay on the colours the less of a window it will be. The two things to be done with a window are to wash it and then forget it. So the truly pious have always said the two things to do personally are to cleanse and to forget oneself . . . . This humility, as I say, was with Arnold a mental need . . . . But he was driven to preaching humility merely as a thing to clear the head. He found the virtue which was just then being flung in the mire as fit only for nuns and slaves; and he saw that it was essential to philosophers. The most unpractical merit of ancient piety became the most practical merit of modern investigation. I repeat, he did not understand that headlong and happy humility which belongs to the more beautiful souls of the simpler ages . . . . he had little sympathy with the old ecstasies of self-effacement. But for this very reason it is all the more important that his main work was an attempt to preach some kind of self-effacement even to his own self-assertive age. He realized that the saints had even understated the case for humility, They had always said that without humility we should never see the better world to come. He realized that without humility we could not even see this world.(37)

Pride is also opposed to the element of surprise and enthusiasm, another part of wonder:

> Humility was largely meant as a restraint upon the arrogance and infinity of the appetite of man. He was always outstripping his mercies with his own newly invented needs. His very power of enjoyment destroyed half his joys. By asking for pleasure, he lost the chief pleasure; for the chief pleasure is surprise. Hence it became evident that if a man would make his world large, he must be always making himself small. Even the haughty visions, the tall cities, and the toppling pinacles are the creations of humility. Giants that tread down forests like grass are the creations of humility. Towers that vanish upwards above the loneliest star are the creations

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(37) G. K. CHESTERTON, G. K. C. As M. C., pp. 19-22.

> of humility. For towers are not tall unless we look up at them; and giants are not giants unless they are larger than we. All this gigantesque imagination, which is, perhaps, the mightiest of the pleasures of man, is at bottom entirely humble. It is impossible without humility to enjoy anything - even pride.(38)

We see from the above quotation not only the opposition of pride to surprise and enthusiasm, but also how it prevents joy, an effect of wonder.

Another part of wonder, the love of things, is also linked with joy, the effect of wonder, in its opposition to pride:

> To put the thing shortly, Christianity had taught men to be humble that they might realise how bad things were. Francis was the first (after Christ himself) to teach men to be humble that they might realise how good things were. Pride is not only an enemy to instruction, Pride is an enemy to amusement. The main lesson of St. Francis of Assisi is this idea of an almost fantastic pleasure . . . . He marks the point where humility has at last become successful because it has at last become joyful. The sin of the pagan world has at last been expiated and left behind . . . . The later pagan had worshipped himself. The earlier Christian had been forced to revile himself. When he had begun to revile himself he began to enjoy himself.(39)

Religious awe is another part of wonder. Pride is also opposed to this, for pride does not wish to bend its head in reverence: "A sentiment of superiority keeps us cool and practical; the mere facts would make our knees knock

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(38) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 54-55.

(39) IDEM, Lunacy and Letters, pp. 100-101.

under us with religious fear."(40) "The greater and stronger a man is the more he would be inclined to prostrate himself before a periwinkle."(41)

Akin to this is childlikeness, another part of wonder; "a strict and searching humility" makes "a man as a little child, who can sit at the feet of the grass."(42)

Just as pride is opposed to joy, so it is opposed to gratitude, another effect of wonder:

> Anyhow, it is true that both the happy hedonists and the unhappy pessimists were stiffened by the opposite principle of pride. The pessimist was proud of pessimism, because he thought nothing good enough for him; the optimist was proud of optimism, because he thought nothing was bad enough to prevent him from getting good out of it. There were valuable men of both these types; there were men with many virtues; but they not only did not possess the virtue I was thinking of, but they never thought of it. They would decide that life was not good, or that it had a great deal of good; but they were not in touch with this particular notion, of having a great deal of gratitude even for a very little good. And as I began to believe more and more that the clue was to be found in such a principle, even if it was a paradox, I was more and more disposed to seek out those who specialised in humility, though for them it was the door of heaven and for me the door of earth.(43)

Another effect of wonder is camaraderie and the spirit of democracy. Pride is not productive of these either.

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(40) G. K. CHESTERTON, Heretics, p. 63.

(41) Ibid., p. 64.

(42) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 172.

(43) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 346.

A man who is proud "has no humility, and therefore no realism. He has never been inside himself; and so could never be inside another man."(44) A man who cannot sympathize or feel with another person is not one who is going to rejoice with those who rejoice - he will have no camaraderie.

Pride is inclined to the spirit of aristocracy rather than the spirit of democracy. Chesterton speaks of "Carlyle's pathetic belief (or anyone else's pathetic belief) in 'the wise few'. There are no wise few. Every aristocracy that has ever existed has behaved, in all essential points, exactly like a small mob."(45)

The Christian dogma of original sin is the doctrinal basis for humility:

> The weak point in the whole of Carlyle's case for aristocracy lies, indeed, in his most celebrated phrase. Carlyle said that men were mostly fools. Christianity, with a surer and more reverent realism, says that they are all fools. This doctrine is sometimes called the doctrine of original sin. It may also be described as the doctrine of the equality of men. But the essential point of it is merely this, that whatever primary and far-reaching moral dangers affect any man, affect all men. All men can be criminals, if tempted; all men can be heroes, if inspired.(46)

Chesterton says that Carlyle taught that that man should rule who feels that he is able to rule; but this is

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(44) G. K. CHESTERTON, Utopia of Usurers, p. 103.

(45) IDEM, Heretics, pp. 167-168.

(46) Ibid., p. 167.

a pagan idea:

> "If our faith comments on government at all, its comment must be this - that the man should rule who does not think that he can rule. Carlyle's hero may say 'I will be king'; but the Christian saint must say 'Nolo episcopari'. If the great paradox of Christianity means anything, it means this - that we must take the crown in our hands, and go hunting in dry places and dark corners of the earth until we find the one man who feels himself unfit to wear it."(47)

The very idea of voting is based on this same Christian idea of humility: "It is a mystical adventure; it is specially trusting those who do not trust themselves."(48)

Lastly, pride is opposed to the effect of wonder which we call valor:

> The armies that have most swiftly and suddenly broken their enemies in pieces have been the religious armies . . . . And a religious army may, by its nature, be defined as an army in which every man is taught not to exalt but to abase himself."(49)

Chesterton prophesies that humility will be the pivot force in the great coming battle between Christianity and her enemies:

> When in the near future the real collision comes between Christianity and the genuine forces opposed to it, the central symbol and standard round which the whole battle will rage will be the problems of the thing called Humility. The other virtues the moderns will admit even if they weaken them or distort them. Mercy they will admit, though they may degrade it into humanitarianism. Justice they will

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(47) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 220-221.

(48) Ibid., p. 221.

(49) IDEM, Heretics, p. 168.

admit, though they may deaden it until it becomes merely order. Even faith they will be forced to admit, because of the high degree of faith which is necessary for the acceptation of their own philosophies. But they will be able plausibly and defensibly, and with an air of modern intelligence, to deny that humility is a virtue at all.(50)

(50) G. K. CHESTERTON, Lunacy and Letters, p. 99.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE ENEMIES OF WONDER V -

PESSIMISM AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

In Chesterton we find an approach to the ancient problem of evil that is refreshing, inspiring, full of exultation and free flowing praise of God and His infinite Goodness and Mercy. For Chesterton, perhaps better than any writer before him - certainly better than any writer in the English language - tosses with his artistic brush upon the canvas of his manuscripts a vast and admirable picture of the meaning behind all the errors and sins and sufferings of the world. As the reader scans the pages his joy widens into an immense good humor and understanding that encompasses all creation - that embraces all men. The reader seems to give a very special insight into the meaning and purpose of evil by flashes of phrases like streaks of lightning that enlighten the whole landscape for a moment and then withdraw into the heavens lest too much be seen for human eye to bear.

Not only does Chesterton proceed in the direction of a comprehension of how God draws good from evil as we may be told by any prosaic theological scribe; but he mounts to a higher plateau where he seems to see how God takes evil and turns it inside out and upside down and hurls it against itself so that not only is good drawn from evil, but evil is turned into good. And this is a magic that only a Creator

could perform; for evil, we are told by the philosophers, has no positive existence of its own, but is only the absence of a good that should be there - and only God can create from nothing.

In the forgiveness of sin the sin is removed from the sinner as far as the East is from the West - it is drowned in the depths of the sea; but in Chesterton we are told that this removed sin, this drowned and dripping sin, is used somehow for the production of the materials of a new creation, the creation of things which the Creator can then look upon again as he looked on things in the morning of the world and saw that they were good.

Since Chesterton says: "it was largely because of the pessimism that I did begin to write"(1); and since this writing about pessimism was writing about his own personal experience with the problems of pessimism, it is unavoidable that we should start our discussion of the problem of evil with the story of his own special difficulties as he himself saw fit to describe them. Even he experienced the greatest difficulty in reporting his youthful problems: "I deal here with the darkest and most difficult part of my task; the period of youth which is full of doubts and morbidities and temptations . . . . "(2)

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, Avowals and Denials, pp. 165-166.

(2) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 75.

Thorny though the task may have been, Chesterton succeeded in presenting his case in a manner which any other writer would find very hard to paraphrase; so let him speak for himself:

> What surprises me in looking back on youth, and even on boyhood, is the extreme rapidity with which it can think its way back to fundamental things. At a very early age I had thought my way back to thought itself. It is a very dreadful thing to do; for it may lead to thinking that there is nothing but thought. At this time I did not very clearly distinguish between dreaming and waking; not only as a mood but as a metaphysical doubt, I felt as if everything might be a dream. It was as if I had myself projected the universe from within, with all its trees and stars, and that is so near to the notion of being God that it is manifestly even nearer to going mad. Yet I was not mad, in any medical or physical sense; I was simply carrying the scepticism of my time as far as it would go. And I soon found it would go a great deal further than most of the sceptics went. While dull atheists came and explained to me that there was nothing but matter, I listened with a sort of calm horror of detachment, suspecting that there was nothing but mind. I have always felt that there was something thin and third-rate about materialists and materialism ever since. The atheists told me so pompously that he did not believe there was any God; and there were moments when I did not even believe there was any atheist..
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> And as with mental, so with moral extremes. There is something truly menacing in the thought of how quickly I could imagine, when I had never committed the mildest crime.(3)

We must interrupt Chesterton's account here to call special attention to that last sentence because a recent writer on Chesterton seems to have ignored it in publicizing painful and annoying suggestions as to his youthful moral

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(3) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, p. 88.

life.(4)

To continue with Chesterton's account, he sums up the sad situation by saying:

> I dug quite low enough to discover the devil; and even in some dim way to recognise the devil. At least I never, even in this first vague and sceptical stage, indulged very much in the current arguments about the relativity of evil or the unreality of sin. Perhaps, when I eventually emerged as a sort of theorist and was described as an Optimist, it was because I was one of the few people in that world of diabolism who really believed in devils.
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> In truth, the story of what was called my Optimism was rather odd. When I had been for some time in these, the darkest depths of the contemporary pessimism, I had a strong inward impulse to revolt; to dislodge this incubus or throw off this nightmare. But as I was still thinking the thing out by myself, with little help from philosophy and no real help from religion, I invented a rudimentary and makeshift theory of my own. It was substantially this; that even mere existence, reduced to its most primary limits, was extraordinary enough to be exciting.(5) Anything was magnificent as compared with nothing. Even if the very daylight were a dream, it was a day-dream; it was not a nightmare. The mere fact that one could wave one's arms and legs about . . . showed that it had not the mere paralysis of a nightmare. Or if it was a nightmare, it was an enjoyable nightmare. In fact, I had wandered to a position not very far from the phrase of my Puritan grandfather, when he said that he would thank God for his creation if he were a lost soul. I hung on to the remains of religion by one thin thread of thanks.(6)

It is at this point in his Autobiography that Chesterton acknowledges his appreciation of the clues to his

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(4) Cf. Garry WILLS, Chesterton Man and Mask..

(5) This is the moment of the birth of our "virtue" of wonder.

(6) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, pp. 89-90.

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particular kind of optimism that were given him by the works of Browning, Stevenson, and Whitman.

In speaking of the pessimism of the Victorian Age, Chesterton pays this tribute to Stevenson: "There are many of my own age to testify with me that they would hardly have been able to fight against it, or even live through it, but for the spirit and the genius of Robert Louis Stevenson."(7) The reasons why Stevenson had such an effect are important, for we find here an ancestor of the spirit of wonder:

> He did, in his most characteristic works, set out forthwith to fill up the too plain outlines of the old juvenile melodrama with the colours of carefully selected and discriminating art; he sought to bring out what had really been so intensely delightful in those obscure delights; and to interpret them anew to grown-up people, without losing the memory that had made them peculiarly precious to children. It is this psychological experiment - the attempt to find out whether the fantastic pleasure of infancy could be continued through the maturer development of manhood - that is the special interest of Stevenson.(8)

For Browning's similar influence we refer the reader to Chesterton's book on the subject, Robert Browning.

As to Whitman, the strength of his influence can be seen in an incident in Chesterton's life related by Maisie Ward:

> Another powerful influence in the direction of mental health was the discovery of Walt Whitman's poetry. "I shall never forget," Lucian Oldershaw writes,

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(7) G. K. CHESTERTON, Generally Speaking, p. 244.

(8) Ibid., p. 238.

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> "reading to him from the Canterbury Walt Whitman in my bedroom at West Kensington. The seance lasted from two to three hours, and we were intoxicated with the excitement of the discovery."(9)

What was it that Chesterton found in Whitman? One literary historian puts it this way:

> Emerson had stated his wish for a writer who could unify American life by reference to some supreme spiritual truth as the binding cord; Whitman thought he had found that truth in the doctrine of the equality and goodness of man, but at the same time he dimly questioned as to whether he had managed to tie all the themes quite together with the proper spiritual strand. His Song of the Answerer is the expression of a hope for the 'maker of poems' who should come after him and complete what he had begun.(10)

Chesterton more than once tells us that he came to realize that this democratic spirit of Whitman's was only a mood and had no doctrinal basis of support; but Chesterton found that basis - Chesterton was that "maker of poems."

Even though Chesterton owed some debt of gratitude to these optimistic writers for some seeds of thought, his brand of optimism was peculiarly his own:

> What I meant, whether or not I managed to say it, was this; that no man knows how much he is an optimist, even when he calls himself a pessimist, because he has not really measured the depths of his debt . . . . At the back of our brains, so to speak, there was a forgotten blaze or burst of astonishment at our own existence. The object of the artistic and spiritual life was to dig for this submerged sunrise of wonder; so that a man sitting in a chair might suddenly understand that he was actually alive, and be happy.(11)

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(9) Maisie WARD, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 50.

(10) Grant C. KNIGHT, American Literature and Culture, N. Y., N. Y., Ray Long and Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1932, ix, 523 p., p. 277.

(11) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, pp. 90-91.

We can see from the above quotation how closely associated was the concept of wonder with the work, Manalive, which we have copiously referred to in past pages; for at this juncture in his Autobiography Chesterton tells us that it was about this time that he conceived the idea of writing this type of novel, in which "a benevolent being . . . went about with a pistol, which he would suddenly point at a pessimist, when that philosopher said that life was not worth living."(12)

But before he wrote Manalive he wrote another novel of very great significance. This was The Man Who Was Thursday; which Chesterton was flattered to learn was used by a psychoanalyst as a corrective among his morbid patients. The theme of the book, in a word, is that a man has a number of seeming enemies who turn out to be his friends in reality. He tells us that the book was written in an atmosphere of pessimism and materialism and must be understood in such a context:

> It is in relation to that particular heresy that much of its main suggestion must be understood. Perhaps it is not worthwhile to try to kill heresies which so rapidly kill themselves - and the cult of suicide committed suicide some time ago. But I should not wish it supposed, as some I think have supposed, that in resisting the heresy of pessimism I implied the equally morbid and diseased insanity of optimism. I was not then considering whether anything is really evil, but whether everything is really evil; and in relation to the latter nightmare it does still seem

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(12) G. K. CHESTERTON, Autobiography, p. 91.

> to me relevant to say that nightmares are not true; and that in them even the faces of friends may appear as the faces of fiends. I tried to turn this notion of resistance to a nightmare into topsy-turvy tale about a man who fancied himself alone among enemies, and found that each of the enemies was in fact on his own side and in his own solitude.(13)

This last passage was taken from an introduction to a play which was made from the book. We have further explanation in the Autobiography:

> The story . . . was meant to begin with the picture of the world at its worst and to work toward the suggestion that the picture was not so black as it was already painted . . . . First, I was trying vaguely to found a new optimism, not on the maximum but the minimum of good. I did not mind the pessimist who complained that there was so little good. But I was furious, even to slaying, with the pessimist who asked what was the good of good. And second, even in the earliest days and even for the worst reasons, I already knew too much to pretend to get rid of evil. I introduced at the end one figure who really does, with a full understanding, deny and defy the good.(14)

The clearest picture of the philosophy behind the book and its relation to the trying experiences of Chesterton's youth is seen in the dedicatory poem. It was addressed to one of his dear friends, Edmund Bentley:

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather,
Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul when we were boys together.
Science announced nonentity and art admired decay;
The world was old and ended; but you and I were gay.
Round us in antic order their crippled vices came -
Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame.

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(13) G. K. CHESTERTON, G. K. C. As M. C., pp. 205-206.

(14) IDEM, Autobiography, pp. 98-99.

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Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom,
Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a plume.
Life was a fly that faded, and death a drone that stung;
The world was very old indeed when you and I were young.
They twisted even decent sin to shapes not to be named:
Men were ashamed of honour; but we were not ashamed.

Weak if we were and foolish, not thus we failed, not thus;
When that black Baal blocked the heavens he had no hymn from us.
Children we were - our forts of sand even as weak as we,
High as they went we piled them up to break that bitter sea.
Fools as we were in motley, all jangling and absurd,
When all church bells were silent our cap and bells were heard.

Not all unhelped we held the fort, our tiny flags unfurled;
Some giants laboured in that cloud to lift it from the world.
I find again the book we found, I feel the hour that flings
Far out of fish-shaped Paumanok some cry of cleaner things;
And the Green Carnation withered, as in forest fires that pass,
Roared in the wind of all the world ten million leaves of grass;
Or sane and sweet and sudden as a bird sings in the rain -
Truth out of Tusitila spoke and pleasure out of pain.
Yea, cool and clean and sudden as a bird sings in the grey,
Dunedin to Samoa spoke, and darkness unto day.
But we were young; we lived to see God break their bitter charms,
God and the good Republic come riding back in arms:
We have seen the city of Mansoul, even as it rocked, relieved -
Blessed are they who did not see, but being blind, believed.

This is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells,
And none but you shall understand the true thing that it tells -
Of what collosal gods of shame could cow men and yet crash,
Of what huge devils hid the stars, yet fell at a pistol flash.
The doubts that were so plain to chase, so dreadful to withstand -
Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand?
The doubts that drove us through the night as we two talked amain,
And day had broken on the streets e'er it broke upon the brain.
Between us, by the peace of God, such truth can now be told;

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Yea, there is strength in striking root, and good in growing old.
We have found common things at last, and marriage and a creed,
And I may safely write it now, and you may safely read.(15)

One doctrine of the "creed" he found was a realist psychology, which found support in the Church in which he came to believe:

> I have said that my morbidities were mental as well as moral; and sounded the most appalling depths of fundamental scepticism and solipsism. And there again I found that the Church had gone before me and established her adamantine foundations; that she had affirmed the actuality of external things; so that even madmen might hear her voice; and by a revelation in their very brain begin to believe their eyes.(16)

Another doctrine that he discovered and then found that the Church had it before him was the doctrine of original sin and the potentialities for evil that are found in every man:

> It is the utterance of that bitter and heartrending period of youth which comes before we realise the one grand and logical basis of all optimism - the doctrine of original sin. The boy at this stage being an ignorant and inhuman idealist, regards all his faults as frightful secret malformations, and it is only later that he becomes conscious of that large and beautiful and benignant explanation that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.(17)

We have spoken earlier of the sense of our exile

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(15) G. K. CHESTERTON, To Edmund Clerihew Bentley, The dedication of "The Man Who Was Thursday", in The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, pp. 103-104

(16) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 354.

(17) IDEM, Robert Browning, p. 21.

condition as a means to arouse the spirit of wonder. It is precisely this that Chesterton felt; and that is what we mean when we say he discovered original sin before he knew its name:

> "That is what makes life at once so splendid and so strange. We are in the wrong world. When I thought that was the right town, it bored me; when I knew it was wrong, I was happy. So the false optimism, the modern happiness, tires us because it tells us that we fit into this world. The true happiness is that we don't fit. We come from somewhere else. We have lost our way."(18)

The element of surprise or enthusiasm that is a part of wonder enters into the picture here, as we can see. He is referring here to an error he made in his travels, whereby he arrived at the wrong town. It was a surprise which enlisted his enthusiastic interest.

This philosophical or dogmatic discovery of our exile condition precedes our growth in wonder, our "second childhood":

> It was a part of that realisation of the real riddle of man, which is hidden from boys and comes only to men in their maturity; and which took on more and more the nature of a religious enlightenment; upon the true doctrine of Original Sin and Human Dignity. It was part of that belated process of growing up, which must unfortunately precede the splendid attainment of second childhood.(19)

Since there are such happy results Chesterton feels

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(18) G. K. CHESTERTON, Tremendous Trifles, p. 315.

(19) IDEM, Autobiography, p. 257.

that he can rightfully say: "the only really happy and hopeful faith is a faith in the Fall of Man."(20)

A third philosophic dogma which Chesterton discovered was the efficacy of second causes, which is so opposed to fatalism and panthéism, forms of pessimism which we shall discuss below.

The period we have been discussing was a period which was overshadowed by the black cloud of Schopenhauer and at Chesterton's time was depressed by Oscar Wilde and a gloomy spell of H. G. Wells. But Chesterton had no reason to think that this gloom was dissipated in more recent days:

> Why is it that so many people only want to make a case for the negative badness not only of a bad thing, but of all things as being bad? The present generation has had more pleasure and enjoyment than any previous generation. Is that the right way of stating the riddle? Or is that the answer?(21)

Evidently he thinks it is the answer:

> Pessimism is not in being tired of evil but in being tired of good. Despair does not lie in being weary of suffering, but in being weary of joy. It is when for some reason or other the good things in a society no longer work that the society begins to decline; when its food does not feed, when its cures do not cure, when its blessings refuse to bless.(22)

Modern society is offering counsels of despair; one example is birth control:

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(20) G. K. CHESTERTON, Generally Speaking, p. 140.

(21) IDEM, Avowals and Denials, p. 170.

(22) IDEM, The Everlasting Man, p. 181.

> The pessimists have a curious way of urging us to counsels of despair as the only solution of a problem they have not troubled to solve. They declare solemnly that some unnatural thing would become necessary if certain conditions existed; and then somehow assume from that that they exist. They never think of attempting to prove that they exist, before they prove what follows from their existence. This is exactly the sort of plunging and premature pessimism, for instance, that people exhibit about Birth Control. Their desire is towards destruction; their hope is for despair; they eagerly anticipate the darkest and most doubtful predictions. They run with eager feet before and beyond the lingering and inconveniently slow statistics; like as the hart pants for the water-brooks they thirst to drink of Styx and Lethe before their hour; even the facts they show fall far short of the faith that they see shining beyond them; for faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.(23)

Pessimism has many relatives; and it seems right to call paganism its father:

> It is a modern slander on pagans to represent paganism as almost identical with pleasure. But anyhow, nobody acquainted with the great Greek and Latin literature, even in the smallest degree, will ever dream of identifying paganism with optimism. It would at least be a great deal nearer the truth to say there, as everywhere else, the fundamental character of paganism is pessimism.(24)

Paganism is intimately bound up with fatalism: "Unfortunately, every heathen seems fated to be a fatalist, and every fatalist seems fated to be a pessimist."(25)

Chesterton means that the materialist must affirm that

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(23) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Outline of Sanity, p. 188.

(24) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 236.

(25) IDEM, All Is Grist, p. 90.

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since everything is matter and no such thing as spirit or spiritual faculties like free will could exist, therefore everything, including man, is subject to mere mechanical laws.

This is true also of that brand of paganism called pantheism:

> The root phrase for all Christian theism was this, that God was a creator, as an artist is a creator. A poet is so separate from his poem that he himself speaks of it as a little thing he has 'thrown off'. Even in giving it forth he has flung it away. This principle that all creation and procreation is a breaking off is at least as consistent through the cosmos as the evolutionary principle that all growth is a branching out. A woman loses a child even in having a child. All creation is separation. Birth is as solemn a parting as death.
>
> It was the prime philosophic principle of Christianity that this divorce in the divine act of making (such as severs the poet from the poem or the mother from the new-born child) was the true description of the act whereby the absolute energy made the world. According to most philosophers, God in making the world enslaved it. According to Christianity, in making it, He set it free. God had written, not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he had planned as perfect, but which had necessarily been left to human actors and stage-managers, who had since made a great mess of it.(26)

The idea is that this is just the opposite of pantheism. Pantheism would deny the separation mentioned above and therefore would deny the eficacy of second causes and would as a consequence be fatalistic and deterministic.

Pantheism cannot have the charity that goes with wonder;

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(26) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 142-143.

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> Love desires personality; therefore love desires division. It is the instinct of Christianity to be glad that God has broken the universe into little pieces, because they are living pieces. It is her instinct to say "little children love one another" rather than to tell one large person to love himself.(27)

Pantheism is of its very nature opposed to wonder:

> The Christian saint is happy because he has verily been cut off from the world; he is separate from things and is staring at them in astonishment. But why should the Buddhist saint be astonished at things? since there is really only one thing, and that being impersonal can hardly be astonished at itself. There have been many pantheist poems suggesting wonder, but no really successful ones. The pantheist cannot wonder, for he cannot praise God or praise anything as really distinct from himself.(28)

In a word: "The Eastern mysticism is an ecstasy of unity; the Christian mysticism is an ecstasy of creation, that is of separation and mutual surprise."(29)

The fact that the Buddhists call Buddha the lord of compassion does not mean love in the Christian sense:

> It seems to me almost the opposite of what Christians mean by charity. The rough, shorthand way of putting the difference is that the Christian pities men because they are dying, and the Buddhist pities them because they are living. The Christian is sorry for what damages the life of a man; but the Buddhist is sorry for him because he is alive. At any rate, he is sorry for him because he is himself.(30)

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(27) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, p. 245.

(28) Ibid., p. 247.

(29) IDEM, A Miscellany of Men, p. 194.

(30) IDEM, Generally Speaking, p. 99.

We see, then, how opposed pantheism is to the surprise, enthusiasm, love of things and men which are parts of wonder. It is also against humility, for you worship yourself.

Another pessimist philosophy was Manicheism - and still is, according to Chesterton; that is, he feels that it exists even today, but in different form.

> It . . . has that nameless note of irresponsibility, which belongs to much of the metaphysics and morals of Asia, from which the Manichean mystery came. But it is always in one way or another a notion that nature is evil; or that evil is at least rooted in nature. The essential point is that as evil has roots in nature, so it has rights in nature. Wrong has as much right to exist as right . . . . this notion took many forms. Sometimes it was a dualism, which made evil an equal partner with good; so that neither could be called an usurper. More often it was a general idea that demons had made the material world; and if there were any good spirits, they were concerned only with the spiritual world. Later, again, it took the form of Calvinism, which held that God had indeed made the world, but in a special sense, made the evil as wellas the good; had made an evil will as well as the evil world. On this view, if a man chooses to damn his soul alive, he is not thwarting God's will, but rather fulfilling it. In these two forms, of the early Gnosticism and the later Calvinism, we see the superficial variety and fundamental unity of Manichaeism. The old Manichaeans taught that Satan originated the whole work of creation commonly attributed to God. The new Calvinists taught that God originated the whole work of damnation commonly attributed to Satan. One looked back to the first day when a devil acted like a god; the other looked forward to a last day when a god acted like a devil. But both had the idea that the creator of the earth was primarily the creator of the evil, whether we call him a devil or a god.(31)

We find this evil not only outside the Church, but also

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(31) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, pp.123-124.

creeping into the fallible human minds that make up the membership of the Church; while the Church itself remains infallible and must occasionally purge these corrupting elements by its warnings and condemnations.

> The evil is always both within and without the Church; but in a wilder form outside and milder form inside. So it was again in the seventeenth century, when there was Calvinism outside and Jansenism inside. And so it was in the thirteenth century, when the obvious danger outside was in the revolution of the Albigensians; but the potential danger inside was in the very traditionalism of the Augustinians. For the Augustinians derived only from Augustine; and Augustine derived partly from Plato; and Plato was right, but not quite right . . . . After a thousand years of extension, the miscalculation of Platonism had come very near to Manichaeism.(32)

Something akin to that transformation mentioned above has been a more modern change to Manicheism from paganism: denial of free will:

> By ignoring limits, they lost all sense even of the limit that divided life and death, and finally found in death the only unlimited liberty. That ancient and tragic transformation from the Pagan to the Manichee is passing through many minds, and fulfilling itself before our very eyes today . . . . (33)

Freudianism and its allies have brought about this deterioration:

> All this has ended in a sort of Manichean madness against the fundamental facts of life. It is as if every humour of the human body were a disease; every organ were a cancerous growth; the whole make-up of man consisting of nothing but parasitic organisms.

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(32) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. 126-127.

(33) IDEM, Avowals and Denials, p. 189.

From the many modern novels and plays, one would suppose that all maternal affection was a 'possessive' tyranny of egotistical tenderness; as if all domestic contentment were a paralytic stroke of arrested mental progress; as if all natural defence of normal privacy and honour were a disease of atavistic jealousy and subhuman segregation. That there are mothers who are too possessive, or wives who are too conventional, or husbands who are too selfish or unsociable is a fact so obvious that it has been satirized by all the satirists of human history. But the modern thing I mean carries with it quite a different implication. It implies not that the fruit is sometimes rotten, but that the root is always rotten; and the further that feeling goes, the more it works backwards to a rottenness in the very roots of the tree of life. It rather resembles a sort of rage of amputation in a mad surgeon who has forgotten the difference between the malady and the man. There is nothing that needs a sense of proportion as much as amputation; and in this inhuman philosophy it has gone far beyond the cutting off of the hand, or the plucking out of the eye, which symbolize the extremes of asceticism. We may tolerate the dentist, who passes from the curing of toothache to the universal pulling out of teeth. We need not tolerate the psychologist, whose only cure for a headache is cutting off the head. It will be some time before the psychologist can provide an artificial head, as the dentist can provide an artificial set of teeth. . . . Just as these men would have forgotten that there is such a thing as the healthy human body, which we may or may not be able to restore, so they have forgotten entirely that there is a healthy condition of the natural emotions, quite apart from whether it was perfectly attained by our immediate parents in the immediate past. Those who are now called Pagans actually do what they themselves have chiefly blamed in the Puritans: they despise the body and all the affections that lie nearest to the body. Their aestheticism, more than any asceticism, has produced a repugnance for the real facts of life. Christians renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil; the new heathens do their best to accept the devil; but they have not stomach enough really to accept either the flesh or the world.(34)

Chesterton felt that the modern Manicheism took the

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(34) G. K. CHESTERTON, Avowals and Denials, pp.185-187.

form of a certain Puritanism which remained as a mood rather than as a religion. He considered America to be strongly influenced by this mood:

> In dealing with such things as Prohibition, I have sometimes had occasion to mention Puritanism . . . . something that might well seem to sensible people to be only a fine shade of thought, merely theoretical and theological, does, in fact, change the mind. It produces a mood which does darken the world, or some particular part of the world . . . . In most cases the Puritans lost their religion and retained their morality; a deplorable state of things for anybody.(35)

We have touched upon all the forms of pessimism we are aware of in the works of Chesterton: paganism, fatalism, pantheism, Buddhism, Manicheism, Albigensianism, Jansenism, Calvinism, Puritanism, and the modern moods of pessimism. What is the answer to pessimism? How do we fight this enemy of wonder?

There are a number of false answers. The first false answer is the reply of Stoicism, the solution offered by pagans to pagans.

Chesterton, in the context of considering what means we can use to better the world and make real progress, dismisses Stoicism as follows:

> The following propositions have been urged: First, that some faith in our life is required even to improve it; second, that some dissatisfaction with things as they are is necessary even in order to be satisfied; third, that to have this necessary content and necessary discontent it is not sufficient to have the obvious equilibrium of the Stoic. For mere resignation

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(35) G. K. CHESTERTON, As I Was Saying, pp. 43-45.

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> has neither the gigantic levity of pleasure nor the superb intolerance of pain. There is a vital objection to the advice merely to grin and bear it. The objection is that if you merely bear it, you do not grin. Greek heroes do not grin: but gargoyles do - because they are Christian.(36)

As far as wonder is concerned, we see that Stoicism is opposed to enthusiasm, childlikeness, and joy; Chesterton shows how it is also opposed to humility:

> The cheap stoic or superior person is none the less as lifeless as a stone, because he generally regards himself as a precious stone and falls into the not uncommon geological error of supposing that he is the only pebble on the beach. Compared with him, there is something like movement in the mere mass of pebbles that are rolled to and fro by the sea.(37)

The Manicheans explained evil by a positive creation of evil things. Christian Science theorists would do just the opposite: they deny that there is any such thing as evil. This is a false answer to pessimism; it is a false optimism, like Universalism. To this type of thinking Chesterton would give this answer:

> Supposing I were so miserable as to lose the Faith, could I go back to that cheap charity and crude optimism which says that every sin is a blunder, that evil cannot conquer or does not even exist? I could no more go back to those cushioned chapels than a man who has regained his sanity would willingly go back to a padded cell . . . I could not cease to think that a God who had made men and angels free was finer than one who coerced them into comfort . . . I could not cease to think it was a finer doctrine that we choose and make our future life than that it is fitted out for us like an hotel and we are taken there in a celestial omnibus as compulsory as a Black Maria. I know

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(36) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, p. 188.

(37) IDEM, The Glass Walking-Stick, p. 136.

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> that Catholicism is too large for me, and I have not yet explored its beautiful or terrible truths. But I know that Universalism is too small for me; and I could not creep back into that dull safety, who have looked on the dizzy vision of liberty.(38)

Besides this denial of free will that is implicit in these teachings, there is also a practical argument which shows the absurd consequences of the doctrine that there is no sin and death is just a "passing over":

> The logical result of all that hope, happiness and optimism would be hundreds of people hanging from lamposts or thousands of people throwing themselves into wells or canals. We should find the rational result of the modern Religion of Joy and Love in one huge human stampede of suicide. Pessimism would have killed its thousands, but optimism its ten thousands.(39)

There are two types of people who are especially guilty of this sin of denying sin. Journalists do it in a negative way by silence on the subject; criminologists or sociologists do it in a positive way, denying responsibility for crimes.

Chesterton gives the example of a news story about beating your grandmother to death:

> The only real point that is worth mentioning is that the action is wicked, because your grandmother has a right not to be beaten to death. But of this simple moral explanation modern journalism has, as I say, a standing fear. It will call the action anything else - mad, bestial, vulgar, idiotic, rather than call it sinful.(40)

Chesterton defends the free will of criminals against

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(38) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Catholic Church and Conversion, p. 108.

(39) IDEM, The Thing, p. 220.

(40) IDEM, All Things Considered, p. 111.

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those false sentimentalists who would deny it:

> This is the real objection to that torrent of modern talk about treating crime as disease, about making a prison merely a hygienic environment like a hospital, of healing sin by slow scientific methods. The fallacy of the whole thing is that evil is a matter of active choice whereas disease is not. If you say that you are going to cure a profligate as you cure an asthmatic, my cheap and obvious answer is, "Produce the people who want to be asthmatics as many people want to be profligates." A man may lie still and be cured of a malady. But he must not lie still if he wants to be cured of a sin; on the contrary, he must get up and jump about violently. The whole point indeed is perfectly expressed in the very word which we use for a man in hospital; "patient" is in the passive mood; "sinner" is in the active. If a man is to be saved from influenza, he may be a patient. But if he is to be saved from forging, he must not be a patient but an impatient. He must be personally impatient with forgery. All moral reform must start in the active not the passive will.(41)

It is absurd to deny sin, which is so obvious:

> The strongest saints and the strongest sceptics alike took positive evil(42) as the starting-point of their argument. If it be true (as it certainly is) that a man can feel exquisite happiness in skinning a cat, then the religious philosopher can only draw one of two deductions. He must either deny the existence of God, as all atheists do; or he must deny the present union between God and man, as all Christians do. The new theologians seem to think it a highly rationalistic solution to deny the cat.(43)

Another type of false optimism against which Chesterton warred was the "whitewash" optimist:

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(41) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 254-255.

(42) Chesterton does not, by the use of this phrase, deny that evil is the absence of good, as we shall see.

(43) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 24-25.

> What is the evil of the man commonly called an optimist? Obviously, it is felt that the optimist, wishing to defend the honour of this world, will defend the indefensible. He is the jingo of the universe; he will say, "My cosmos, right or wrong." He will be less inclined to the reform of things; more inclined to a sort of front-bench official answer to all attacks, soothing every one with assurances. He will not wash the world, but whitewash the world.(44)

We have said that Chesterton's trust in the Whitman brand of optimism was short-lived because there was no doctrinal backing and therefore "it has evaporated as a mood. . . ."(45) Neither was Stevenson's kind of optimism satisfactory, even though it helped Chesterton greatly at his time of crisis:

> I have already said, and it can hardly be said too often, that the story of Stevenson was a reaction against an age of pessimism. Now the real objection to being a reactionary is that a reactionary, as such, hardly ever avoids reacting into evil and exaggeration. The opposite of the heresy of pessimism was the twin heresy of optimism. Stevenson was not at all attracted to a placid and pacific optimism. But he did begin to be too much attracted to a sort of insolent and oppressive optimism. The reaction from the idea that what is good is always unsuccessful is the idea that what is good is always victorious. And from that many slide into the worse delusion; that what is victorious is always good.(46)

There is also a modern type of optimism which Chesterton condemns: "a sort of cheap cheeriness, at the back of which there is a curious sort of hollow unbelief in reality."(47)

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(44) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, p. 126.

(45) IDEM, The Thing, p. 17.

(46) IDEM, Robert Louis Stevenson, pp. 102-103.

(47) IDEM, All is Grist, p. 73.

What did Chesterton consider to be the right kind of optimism? It was that type of optimism which was based on the metaphysical concept of the goodness of being.

He liked the optimism of Browning:

> As digestion is a good thing which sometimes goes wrong, nerves are good things which sometimes go wrong, so existence itself in the eyes of Browning and all the great optimists is a good thing which sometimes goes wrong. He held himself as free to draw his inspiration from the gift of good health as from the gift of learning or the gift of fellowship. But he held that such gifts were in life innumerable and varied, and that every man, or at least almost every man, possessed some window looking out on this essential excellence of things.(48)

He admired the type of optimism displayed in the works of Dickens:

> These higher optimists, of whom Dickens was one, do not approve of the universe; they do not even admire the universe; they fall in love with it. They embrace life too closely to criticize or even to see it. Existence to such men has the wild beauty of a woman, and those love her with most intensity who love her with least cause.(49)

We see in Browning and Dickens the love of things which we have set down as a part of wonder. In St. Francis, Chesterton saw this extended to all men with the results we have claimed as effects of wonder, the spirit of camaraderie and democracy:

> His very asceticism was in one sense the height of optimism. He demanded a great deal of human nature

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(48) G. K. CHESTERTON, Robert Browning, p. 181.

(49) IDEM, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, pp. 31-32.

> not because he despised it but rather because he trusted it. He was expecting a very great deal from the extraordinary men who followed him; but he was also expecting a good deal from the ordinary men to whom he sent them. He asked the laity for food as confidently as he asked the fraternity for fasting. But he counted on the hospitality of humanity because he really did regard every house as the house of a friend. He really did love and honour ordinary men and ordinary things; indeed we may say that he only sent out the extraordinary men to encourage men to be ordinary.(50)

People are deceived by the Church's recommendations regarding penance and mortification if they do not understand what lies behind this self-denial:

> We look at the rise of Christianity, and conceive it as a rise of self-abnegation and almost of pessimism. It does not occur to us that the mere assertion that this raging and confounding universe is governed by justice and mercy is a piece of staggering optimism fit to set all men capering. The detail over which these monks went mad with joy was the universe itself; the only thing really worthy of enjoyment. The white daylight shone over all the world, the endless forests stood up in their order. The lightning awoke and the tree fell and the sea gathered into mountains and the ship went down, and all these disconnected and meaningless and terrible objects were all part of one dark and fearful conspiracy of goodness, one merciless scheme of mercy. That this scheme of Nature was not accurate or well founded is perfectly tenable, but surely it is not tenable that it was not optimistic.(51)

So Chesterton was satisfied with the kind of optimism displayed by the early monasticism of the Church, he was pleased with that of St. Francis in particular at a later

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(50) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Francis of Assisi, pp. 104-105.

(51) IDEM, Varied Types, p. 63.

period, and in recent times he was encouraged by the spirit of Browning and of Dickens. But he needed, for full satisfaction in this regard, someone who would express the true and full doctrinal basis of optimism in the correct sense. The answer to this need was St. Thomas Aquinas. But before we explore the diagnosis of St. Thomas on our subject, we must present a few additional reasons why Chesterton so detested pessimism.

First of all, it made human life valueless:

> Thus religion is always insisting on the shortening of human life. But it does not insist on the shortness of human life as the pessimists insist on it. Pessimism insists on the shortness of human life in order to show that life is valueless. Religion insists on the shortness of human life in order to show that life is frightfully valuable - is almost horribly valuable. Pessimism says that life is so short that it gives nobody a chance; religion says that life is so short that it gives everybody his final chance. In the first case the word brevity means futility; in the second case, opportunity.(52)

Secondly, it has the same destructive effect as scepticism: it ends discussion:

> When the optimist has said, "All things are interesting," we are left free; we can be interested as much or as little as we please. But when the pessimist says, "No things are interesting," it may be a very witty remark: but it is the last witty remark that can be made on the subject. He has burnt his cathedral; he has had his blaze and the rest is ashes. The sceptics, like bees, give their one sting and die. The pessimist must be wrong, because he says

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(52) G. K. CHESTERTON, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 26.

the last word.(53)

Would the pessimists ever dare to carry out their views into personal action?

> A man in the time of Schopenhauer fashion would say, over the tea-cups, that life is not worth living . . . But he would not go on to say, as a serious thesis, that prussic acid should be served at tea-time instead of tea; or that hospitals should be blown up on the charge that they cometimes save people's lives. In short, he would talk like a pessimist, but he would not think like a pessimist; above all, he would not complete his pessimistic thinking.(54)

Thirdly, it is obvious that there is no impulse to morally good acts if one accepts the tenets of pessimism based on pantheism:

> There is no real possibility of getting out of pantheism any special impulse to moral action. For pantheism implies in its nature that one thing is as good as another; whereas action implies in its nature that one thing is greatly preferable to another.(55)

He explains why pantheism has this effect:

> By insisting specially on the immanence of God we get introspection, self-isolation, quietism, social indifference - Tibet. By insisting specially on the transcendence of God we get wonder, curiosity, moral and political adventure, righteous indignation - Christendom. Insisting that God is inside man, man is always inside himself. By insisting that God transcends man, man has transcended himself.(56)

Chesterton's own hearty good nature led him to complete

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(53) G. K. CHESTERTON, Alarms and Discursions, p. 196.

(54) IDEM, Come to Think of It, p. 142.

(55) IDEM, Orthodoxy, pp. 247-248.

(56) Ibid., p. 250.

scorn for the Manichean type of pessimism:

> All true friendliness begins with fire and food and drink and the recognition of rain or frost. Those who will not begin at the bodily end of things are already prigs and may soon be Christian Scientists. Each human soul has in a sense to enact for itself the gigantic humility of the Incarnation. Every man must descend into the flesh to meet mankind.(57)

Pessimism is contrary to human nature and normal inclination:

> The mass of men have been forced to be gay about the little things; but sad about the big ones. Nevertheless . . . it is not native to man to be so. Man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind; praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul. Pessimism is at best an emotional half-holiday; joy is the uproarious labour by which all things live. Yet, according to the apparent estate of man as seen by the pagan or the agnostic, this primary need of human nature can never be fulfilled. Joy ought to be expansive; but for the agnostic it must be contracted, it must cling to one corner of the world. Grief ought to be a concentration, but for the agnostic its desolation is spread through an unthinkable eternity.(58)

Pessimism is not on the side of truth:

> A man is almost always wrong when he sets about to prove the unreality and uselessness of anything: he is almost invariably right when he sets about to prove the reality and value of anything.(59)

And this is precisely what St. Thomas set out to do with "that positive position of his mind, which is filled and

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(57) G. K. CHESTERTON, What's Wrong With the World? p. 108.

(58) IDEM, Orthodoxy, pp. 296-297.

(59) G. K. CHESTERTON and J. E. Hodder WILLIAMS, Thomas Carlyle, p. 35.

soaked as with sunshine, with the warmth of the wonder of created things."(60)

It was in St. Thomas that Chesterton found the metaphysical basis of his optimism and his wonder:

> Now there is something that lies all over the work of St. Thomas Aquinas like a great light; which is something quite primary and perhaps unconscious with him . . . . the only working word for that atmosphere is Optimism . . . . He did, with a most solid and colossal conviction, believe in Life; and in something like what Stevenson called the great theorem of the livableness of life. It breathes somehow in his very first phrases about the reality of Being. If the morbid Renaissance intellectual is supposed to say, "To be or not to be - that is the question," then the massive medieval doctor does most certainly reply in a voice of thunder, "To be - that is the answer."(61)

We will recall that Chesterton denounced those who refused to acknowledge the existence of sin and evil in the world: "The strongest saints and the strongest sceptics alike took positive evil as the starting-point of their argument."(62) Unless we recognize evil as evil, how are we to appreciate good? Even simple superstitious people are better off in this regard than the modern sophisticated sceptic:

> They at least read things in black and white, and saw life as the battlefield it is. But you are unhappy because you disbelieve in evil, and think it philosophical to see everything in the same light of grey.(63)

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(60) G. K. CHESTERTON, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 140.

(61) Ibid., pp. 131-132.

(62) IDEM, Orthodoxy, p. 24.

(63) IDEM, The Poet and the Lunatics, p. 163.

Why does he say that they are unhappy because they disbelieve in evil? He answers this in his book on Dickens:

> This world can be made beautiful again by beholding it as a battlefield. When we have defined and isolated the evil thing, the colours come back into everything else. When evil things have become evil, good things, in a blazing apocalypse, become good. There are some men who are dreary because they do not believe in God; but there are many others who are dreary because they do not believe in the devil, The grass grows green again when we believe in the devil, the roses grow red again when we believe in the devil.
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> No man was more filled with the sense of this bellicose basis of all cheerfulness than Dickens. He knew very well the essential truth, that the true optimist can only continue an optimist so long as he is discontented. For the full value of this life can only be got by fighting; the violent take it by storm. And if we have accepted everything, we have missed something - war. This life of ours is a very enjoyable fight, but a very miserable truce.(64)

In connection with wonder we would point out here the elements of enthusiasm and the love of things and the effect of valor. Chesterton gives us further insight into this elemental goodness of being:

> The chief fountain in Dickens of what I have called cheerfulness, and some prefer to call optimism, is something deeper than a verbal philosophy. It is, after all, an incomparable hunger and pleasure for the vitality and the variety, for the infinite eccentricity of existence. And this word "eccentricity" brings us, perhaps, nearer to the matter than any other. It is, perhaps, the strongest mark of the divinity of man that he talks of this world as "a strange world", though he has seen no other. We feel that all there is is eccentric, though we do not know what is the centre. This sentiment of the grotesqueness of the universe ran through Dicken's brain and body like the mad blood of the elves. He saw all

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(64) G. K. CHESTERTON, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, p. 204.

his streets in fantastic perspectives, he saw all his cockney villas as top-heavy and wild, he saw every man's nose twice as big as it was, and every man's eyes like saucers. And this was the basis of his gaiety - the only real basis of any philosophical gaiety. This world is not to be justified as the best of all possible worlds. Its merit is not that it is orderly and explicable; its merit is that it is wild and utterly unexplained. Its merit is precisely that none of us could have conceived such a thing, that we should have rejected the bare idea of it as miracle and unreason. It is the best of all impossible worlds.(65)

Chesterton expresses this same idea in reference to a certain type of optimistic art which he applauds:

It is not, of course, in reality a question of optimism in the least, but of an illimitable worship and wonder directed towards the fact of existence. There is a great deal of difference between the optimism which says that things are perfect and the optimism which merely says (with a more primeval modesty) that they are very good. One optimism says that a one-legged man has two legs because it would be so dreadful if he had not. The other optimism says that the fact that the one-legged was born of a woman, has a soul, has been in love and has stood alive under the stars, is a fact so enormous and thrilling that, in comparison, it does not matter whether he has one leg or five. One optimism says that this is the best of all possible worlds. The other says that it is certainly not the best of all possible worlds, but it is the best of all possible things that a world should be possible.(66)

Our phraseology misleads us when we refer to any being as evil:

A knife which cuts clumsily and with difficulty is called a bad knife, which it certainly is not. It is only not so good as other knives to which men have

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(65) G. K. CHESTERTON, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, p. 205.

(66) IDEM, G. F. Watts, p. 146.

> grown accustomed . . . . What we call a bad knife is a good knife not good enough for us . . . what we call a bad civilization is a good civilization not good enough for us. We choose to call the great mass of the history of mankind bad, not because it is bad, but because we are better. This is palpably an unfair picture.(67)

The correct conception of evil seems to be caught in a sentence in one of the fictional works:

> Black cherubs were like the Black Mass - they were symbols of some idea that hell is an inverted copy of heaven, like a landscape hanging downwards in a lake.(68)

Chesterton expresses the whole fundamental metaphysical doctrine about good and evil in more philosophical terms in St. Thomas Aquinas:

> That "God looked on all things and saw that they were good" contains a subtlety which the popular pessimist cannot follow; or is too hasty to notice. It is the thesis that there are no bad things; but only bad uses of things. If you will, there are no bad things but only bad thoughts; and especially bad intentions. Only Calvinists can really believe that hell is paved with good intentions. That is exactly the one thing it cannot be paved with. But it is possible to have bad intentions about good things; and good things, like the world and the flesh, have been twisted by a bad intention called the devil. But he cannot make things bad; they remain as on the first day of creation. The work of heaven alone was material; the making of a material world. The work of hell is entirely spiritual.(69)

When we have the type of optimism of which St. Thomas lays the basis, we then have an optimism which will prevent

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(67) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Defendant, p. 15.

(68) IDEM, The Man Who Knew Too Much, p. 275.

(69) IDEM, St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 125.

despair, an optimism based on the love of things because of their intrinsic goodness. This profound effect of this element in wonder is cleverly expressed in a poem called A Ballad of Suicide:

> The gallows in my garden, people say,
> Is new and neat and adequately tall.
> I tie the noose on in a knowing way
> As one that knots his necktie for a ball;
> But just as all the neighbours - on the wall -
> Are drawing a long breath to shout "Hurray!"
> The strangest whim has seized me . . . After all
> I think I will not hang myself today.
>
> Tomorrow is the time I get my pay -
> My uncle's sword is hanging in the hall -
> I see a little cloud all pink and grey -
> Perhaps the Rector's mother will not call -
> I fancy that I heard from Mr. Gall
> That mushrooms could be cooked another way -
> I never read the works of Juvenal -
> I think I will not hang myself today.
>
> The world will have another washing day;
> The decadents decay; the pedants pall;
> And H. G. Wells has found the children play,
> And Bernard Shaw discovered that they squall;
> Rationalists are growing rational -
> And through the thick woods one finds a stream astray,
> So secret that the very sky seems small -
> I think I will not hang myself today.(70)

But besides this negative effect of preventing despair, there is a more positive result from this kind of optimism. The part of wonder called surprise brings to the fore the effect of wonder called valor, the fighting spirit for that which is right and good. The optimist, as Chesterton says of Dickens, "encounters evil with that beautiful surprise

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(70) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, p. 180.

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which, as it is the beginning of all real pleasure, is also the beginning of all righteous indignation."(71) As a result of this optimism, it is possible to effect reforms which would never come about through the hands of the pessimist:

> For, in order that men should resist injustice, something more is necessary than they should think injustice unpleasant. They must think injustice absurd; above all, they must think it startling. They must retain the violence of virgin astonishment. That is the explanation of the singular fact which must have struck many people in the relations of philosophy and reform. It is the fact (I mean) that optimists are more practical reformers than pessimists. Superficially, one would imagine that the railer would be the reformer; that the man who thought that everything was wrong would be the man to put everything right. In historical practice the thing is quite the other way; curiously enough, it is the man who likes things as they are who really makes them better . . . . Everywhere the man who alters things begins by liking things. And the real explanation of this success of the optimistic reformer, of this failure of the pessimistic reformer, is, after all, an explanation of sufficient simplicity. It is because the optimist can look at wrong not only with indignation but with startled indignation. When the pessimist looks at any infamy, it is to him, after all, only a repetition of the infamy of existence . . . . But the optimist sees injustice as something discordant and unexpected, and it stings him into action. The pessimist can be enraged at wrong; but only the optimist can be surprised at it.(72)

Therefore "the man who believes life to be excellent is the man who alters it most."(73)

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(71) G. K. CHESTERTON, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 48.

(72) IDEM, All Things Considered, pp. 34-35.

(73) IDEM, Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men, p. 7.

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Chesterton gives us some hints on how to be an optimist. The first recommendation we have is some advice he gave to a friend of his: to be an extrovert. It is obvious what part wonder plays in this:

> "The way to be oneself, possess one's personality and prevent that pressure felt in loneliness and sickness, is to think actively and vividly about what the Huns call objective things - and what sensible people call other things. Especially about people who are quite comically different from ourselves, and who yet have been our good companions. One sees even oneself more plainly in other things - especially in things one has done. Every one of us has done some good; and it is a monument, as if we were already dead. We cannot even alter it. I have had morbid nightmares when I have doubted if I believed anything; but I have found the trick of saying: 'If I did not <u>really</u> believe I should not have done this work, or resisted that temptation - or even tried to resist it. My Will knows me better than my Mind does.' Think about solid things outside you; especially about the most solid thing in the world - affection . . . . These things are not fancies of self-righteousness; they are realities as the lamp-post in the road is a reality."(74)

Another method to avoid pessimism is to be positive in your thinking; think of all the good there is to think of:

> They talk; . . . is it not time
> Some of Love's chosen broke the girth,
> And told the good all men have known
> Since the first morning of the earth?(75)

Still another method of preserving a healthy mentality is to avoid fear of normal risks. We have this from the novel, <u>The Ball and the Cross.</u> A monk is clinging to the

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(74) G. K. CHESTERTON, quoted in Maisie Ward, <u>The Return to Chesterton</u>, pp. 242-243.

(75) G. K. CHESTERTON, <u>Vulgarised</u>, in <u>The Wild Knight</u>, p. 109.

very top of St. Paul's Cathedral:

> Father Michael, in spite of his years, and in spite of his asceticism (or because of it, for all I know), was a very healthy and happy old gentleman. And as he swung on a bar above the sickening emptiness of air, he realised, with that sort of dead detachment which belongs to the brains of those in peril, the deathless and hopeless contradiction which is involved in the mere idea of courage. He was a happy and healthy old gentleman and therefore he was quite careless about it. And he felt as every man feels in the taut moment of such terror that his chief danger was terror itself; his only possible strength would be a coolness amounting to carelessness, a carelessness amounting almost to a suicidal swagger. His one wild chance of coming out safely would be in not too desperately desiring to be safe. There might be no footholds down that awful facade, if only he could not care whether they were footholds or no. If he were foolhardy he might escape; if he were wise he would stop where he was till he dropped from the cross like a stone. And this antimony kept on repeating itself in his mind, a contradiction as large and staring as the immense contradiction of the Cross; he remembered having often heard the words, "Whosoever shall lose his life the same shall save it." He remembered with a sort of strange pity that this had always been made to mean that whoever lost his physical life should save his spiritual life. Now he knew the truth that is known to all fighters, and hunters, and climbers of cliffs. He knew that even his animal life could only be saved by a considerable readiness to lose it.(76)

Father Michael's subsequent emotions in his predicament will be of some interest and value to us a little later.

It is obviously more difficult to remain an optimist when pain strikes. Chesterton, however, suggests a very fundamental and practical reason for the existence of pain in one of the stories in The Poet and the Lunatics. The idea

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(76) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Ball and the Cross, pp. 16-18.

of the story is to show how a philosophical idealist, believing that the outside world is really an inside world and therefore of his own creation, begins to think himself omnipotent; and the cure is pain:

> "Oh, I know that people have written all kinds of cant and false comfort about the cause of evil; and of why there is pain in the world. . . . But . . . this truth is true; objectively and experimentally true. There is no cure for that nightmare of omnipotence except pain; because that is the thing a man knows he would not tolerate if he could really control it. A man must be in some place from which he would certainly escape if he could, if he is really to realize that all things do not come from within . . . .
>
> "It is the only way," he kept repeating; "it is the only answer to the heresy of the mystic; which is to fancy that mind is all. It is to break your heart. Thank God for hard stones; thank God for hard facts; thank God for thorns and rocks and deserts and long years. At least I know now that I am not the best or strongest thing in the world. At least I know now that I have not dreamed of everything."(77)

To this point we have discussed pessimism, false optimism, true optimism with its metaphysical basis, its practical results, and some means to attain it. But there remains still a deep mystery behind the evil in the universe; and Chesterton has tried in his own unique way to penetrate a little into this mysterious domain. The result has been that he seems to have established a sort of beachhead by his suggestions towards an incomplete solution, which is all we can hope for in this life; as Chesterton intimates in an early book: "We had only a confused sense of everything

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(77) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Poet and the Lunatics, pp. 104-105.

having been put right, the sense men will have when they come into the presence of God."(78)

Chesterton's optimism told him that nature is not just a blind chaos working against us in many ways, but that there is something rational to explain it. The following is a passage from The Man Who Was Thursday; we must remember that Sunday represents nature:

> "And somehow," concluded Bull, "that's why I can't help liking old Sunday. No, it's not an admiration of force, or any silly thing like that. There is a kind of gaiety in the thing, as if he were bursting with some good news. Haven't you sometimes felt it on a spring day? You know Nature plays tricks, but somehow that day proves they are good-natured tricks. I never read the Bible myself, but that part they laugh at is literal truth, 'Why leap ye, ye high hills?' The hills do leap - at least, they try to . . . . Why do I like Sunday? . . . how can I tell you? . . . (79)

Another character expresses his views on Sunday:

> "Then, and again and always," went on Syme like a man talking to himself, "that has been for me the mystery of Sunday, and it is also the mystery of the world. When I see the horrible back, I am sure the noble face is but a mask. When I see the face for an instant, I know the back is only a jest. Bad is so bad, that we cannot but think good an accident; good is so good, that we feel certain that evil could be explained. But the whole came to a kind of crest yesterday when I raced Sunday for the cab, and was just behind him all the way."
>
> "Had you time for thinking then?" asked Ratcliffe.
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> "Time," replied Syme, "for one outrageous thought. I was suddenly possessed with the idea that the blind, blank back of his head was really his face - an awful, eyeless face staring at me! And I fancied that the

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(78) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Club of Queer Trades, p. 263

(79) IDEM, The Man Who Was Thursday, p. 171.

figure running in front of me was really a figure running backwards, and dancing as he ran."

"Horrible!" said Dr. Bull, and shuddered.

"Horrible is not the word," said Syme. "It was exactly the worst instant of my life. And yet ten minutes afterwards, when he put his head out of the cab and made a grimace like a gargoyle, I knew that he was only like a father playing hide-and-seek with his children."(80)

Syme finishes his monologue about Sunday in this fashion:

"Listen to me," cried Syme with extraordinary emphasis. "Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face? If we could only get around in front - "(81)

This same feeling of certainty that there is something very reasonable to explain all the evil in the world is again expressed in Chesterton's commentary on the Book of Job. Job is characterized as

an outraged and insulted optimist. He wishes the universe to justify itself, not because he wishes it to be caught out, but because he really wishes it to be justified. He demands an explanation from God . . . He does it in the spirit in which a wife might demand an explanation from her husband whom she really respected. He remonstrates with his Maker because he is proud of his Maker. He even speaks of the Almighty as his enemy, but he never doubts, at the back of his mind, that his enemy has some kind of a case which he does not understand.(82)

Could it be true that Chesterton had a special mystical

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(80) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Man Who Was Thursday, p.176.

(81) Ibid., pp. 176-177.

(82) IDEM, G. K. C. As M. C., pp. 42-43.

insight into the meaning of it all? In a letter to his friend Bentley he writes:

> "A meaningless fit of depression . . . came upon me, and instead of dismissing it . . . I had it out and went very far into the abysses, indeed. The result was that I found that things, when examined, necessarily spelt such a mystically satisfactory state of things, that without getting back to earth, I saw lots that made me certain it is all right. The vision is fading into common day now, and I am glad. The frame of mind was the reverse of gloomy, but it would not do for long. It is embarrassing, talking with God face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend."(83)

Perhaps it was this experience he was referring to when he penned the poem called The End of Fear, in which he says:

> No more . . . Shall evil break my soul with mysteries . . . .
> Last night I held all evil in my hand
> Closed: and behold it was a little thing.(84)

His reaction to his mystical experience is given in the poem:

> Like emptied idiot masks, sin's loves and wars
> Stare at me now: for in the night I broke
> The bubble of a great world's jest, and woke
> Laughing with laughter such as shakes the stars.(85)

Perhaps, too, it was this experience from which he drew the fantastic picture of the emotional adventures of Father Michael, whom we left suspended from the neights of the Cathedral:

To this spasm of sanity and clarity in Michael's mind

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(83) G. K. CHESTERTON quoted in Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 49.

(84) G. K. CHESTERTON, The End of Fear, in The Wild Knight, p. 61.

(85) Ibid., p. 62.

> succeeded a spasm of the elemental terror; the terror of the animal in us which regards the whole universe as its enemy; which, when it is victorious, has no pity, and so, when it is defeated has no imaginable hope. Of that ten minutes of terror it is not possible to speak in human words. But then again in that damnable darkness there began to grow a strange dawn as of grey and pale silver. And of this ultimate resignation or certainty it is even less possible to write; it is something stranger than hell itself; it is perhaps the last of the secrets of God. At the highest crisis of some incurable anguish there will suddenly fall upon the man the stillness of an insane contentment. It is not hope, for hope is broken and romantic and concerned with the future; this is complete and of the present. It is not faith, for faith by its very nature is fierce, and as it were at once doubtful and defiant; but this is simply a satisfaction. It is not knowledge; for the intellect seems to have no particular part in it. Nor is it (as the modern idiots would certainly say it is) a certain numbness or negative paralysis of the powers of grief. It is not negative in the least; it is as positive as good news. It seems almost as if there were some equality among things, some balance in all possible contingencies which we are not permitted to know lest we should learn indifference to good and evil, but which is sometimes shown to us for an instant as a last aid in our last agony.(86)

This same feeling of comfort and satisfaction and content was felt by Job after God speaks to him; at least there seems to be some similarity:

> Verbally speaking the enigmas of Jehovah seem darker and more desolate than the enigmas of Job; yet Job was comfortless before the speech of Jehovah and is comforted after it. He has been told nothing, but he feels the terrible and tingling atmosphere of something which is too good to be told. The refusal of God to explain His design is itself a burning hint of His design. The riddles of God are more satisfying

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(86) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Ball and the Cross, pp. 18-19.

than the solutions of man.(87)

In spite of the fact that Chesterton makes an effort in the direction of an explanation of evil in the world, he never pretends to have given a solution. He merely hints at a solution. The mystery must still remain:

> The mechanical optimist endeavours to justify the universe avowedly upon the ground that it is a rational and consecutive pattern. He points out that the fine thing about the world is that it can all be explained. That is one point, if I may put it so, on which God, in return, is explicit to the point of violence. God says, in effect, that if there is one fine thing about the world, as far as men are concerned, it is that it cannot be explained.(88)

But God Himself in the Book of Job does give us hints:

> Without once relaxing the rigid impenetrability of Jehovah in His deliberate declaration, he has contrived to let fall here and there in the metaphors, in the parenthetical imagery, sudden and splendid suggestions that the secret of God is a bright and not a sad one - semi-accidental suggestions, like light seen for an instant through the cracks of a closed door. It would be difficult to praise too highly, in a purely poetical sense, the instinctive exactitude and ease with which these more optimistic insinuations are let fall in other connections, as if the Almighty Himself were scarcely aware that He was letting them out. For instance, there is that famous passage where Jehovah with devastating sarcasm, asks Job where he was when the foundations of the world were laid, and then (as if merely fixing a date) mentions the time when the sons of God shouted for joy. One cannot help feeling, even upon this meagre information, that they must have had something to shout about. Or again, when God is speaking of snow and hail in the mere catalogue of the physical cosmos, He speaks of them as a treasury that He has

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(87) G. K. CHESTERTON, G. K. C. As M. C., pp. 46-47.

(88) Ibid., p. 47.

> laid up against the day of battle - a hint of some huge Armageddon in which evil shall be at last overthrown.(89)

How many men have had the eyes to see what Chesterton could see in the dark cloud of evil in the world? Chesterton himself mentions Carlyle as having some perception in this direction; but we will note that Carlyle's is only a step on the way to Chesterton's, being less full of content, and less in the vein of pure humor:

> Carlyle has . . . introduced into the philosophy of history one element which had been absent from it since the writing of the Old Testament - the element of something which can only be called the humour in the just government of the universe. "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn, the Lord shall have them in derision." is a note that is struck again in Carlyle for the first time after two thousand years. It is the note of the sarcasm of Providence.(90)

Man is made to the image and likeness of God; and among the things which differentiate man from the animal is the great gift of risibility. It is only man who can see the humor of the universe created by God, the source of all risibility:

> Man is the only creature who does laugh. In the presence of this prodigious fact, the fact that men laugh in different degrees, and at different things, shrivels not merely into insignificance but into invisibility. It is true that I have often felt the physical universe as something like a firework display: the most practical of all practical jokes. But if the cosmos

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(89) G. K. CHESTERTON, G. K. C. As M. C., pp. 48-49.

(90) G. K. CHESTERTON and J. E. HODDER WILLIAMS, Thomas Carlyle, p. 25.

is meant for a joke, men seem to be the only cosmic conspirators who have been let into the joke. There could be no fraternity like our freemasonry in that secret pleasure. It is true that there are no limits to this jesting faculty, that it is not confined to common human jests; but it is confined to human jesters.(91)

Chesterton finds a hint of the laughter of God in certain animals, among which is The Fish:

Dark the sea was: but I saw him,
One great head with goggle eyes,
Like a diabolic cherub
Flying in those fallen skies.

I have heard the hoarse deniers,
I have known the wordy wars;
I have seen a man, by shouting,
Seek to orphan all the stars.

I have seen a fool half-fashioned
Borrow from the heavens a tongue,
So to curse them more at leisure -
And I trod him not as dung.

For I saw that finny goblin
Hidden in the abyss untrod;
And I knew there can be laughter
On the secret face of God.

Blow the trumpet, crown the sages,
Bring the age by reason fed!
(He that sitteth in the heavens,
"He shall laugh" - the prophet said).(92)

Here we can see what deep reasons Chesterton had for the very gentle treatment he meted out to all his adversaries.

He even finds a hint to answer death in the grin of

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(91) G. K. CHESTERTON, Fancies Versus Fads, p. 143.

(92) IDEM, The Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton, pp. 311-312.

The Skeleton:

Here among the flowers I lie
Laughing everlastingly.
No: I may not tell the best;
Surely, friends, I might have guessed
Death was but the good King's jest,
It was hid so carefully.(93)

As a final word on the attribute of mirth in God, we quote here the closing words of Orthodoxy, which include Chesterton's intuitions on the laughter of Christ:

> Joy becomes something gigantic and sadness something special and small . . . . We are perhaps permitted tragedy as a sort of merciful comedy: because the frantic energy of divine things would knock us down like a drunken farce. We can take our own tears more lightly than we could take the tremendous levities of the angels. So we sit perhaps in a starry chamber of silence, while the laughter of the heavens is too loud for us to hear.
>
> Joy, which was the small publicity of the pagan, is the gigantic secret of the Christian. And as I close this chaotic volume I open again the strange small book from which all Christianity came; and I am again haunted by a kind of confirmation. The tremendous figure which fills the Gospels towers in this respect, as in every other, above all the thinkers who ever thought themselves tall. His pathos was natural, almost casual. The Stoics, ancient and modern, were proud of concealing their tears. He never concealed His tears; He showed them plainly on His open face at any daily sight, such as the far sight of His native city. Yet He concealed something. Solemn supermen and imperial diplomatists are proud of restraining their anger. He never restrained His anger. He flung furniture down the front steps of the Temple, and asked men how they expected to escape the damnation of Hell. Yet He restrained something. I say it with reverence; there was in

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(93) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Skeleton in The Wild Knight, p. 6.

> that shattering personality a thread that must be called shyness. There was something that He hid from all men when He went up a mountain to pray. There was something that He covered constantly by abrupt silence or impetuous isolation. There was one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth.(94)

"Follow me", said Christ. But we cannot follow him in the divine attribute of mirth unless we first see things with the divine outlook, the light of wonder, of which God Himself gives us an example in the Book of Job:

> God will make man see things, if it is only against the black background of nonentity. God will make Job see a startling universe if He can only do it by making Job see an idiotic universe . . . . He unrolls before Job a long panorama of created things . . . . He so describes each of them that it sounds like a monster walking in the sun. The whole is a sort of psalm or rhapsody of the sense of wonder. The maker of all things is astonished at the things He has Himself made.(95)

. . .

There was a mystic - I almost said another mystic - who claimed some revelations in the fourteenth century. We would wonder, when we read them, whether we have not found a spiritual ancestor of Chesterton; the things she says she learned about the problem of evil are cast in the same mold as the sayings of Chesterton. She tells us that she was

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(94) G. K. CHESTERTON, Orthodoxy, pp. 297-299.

(95) IDEM, G. K. C. As M. C., p. 48.

deploring the existence of sin and was told: "'It behoved that there should be sin; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.'"(96) Then she says she saw all the pain and suffering in the world, but "All this was shewed in a touch and readily passed over into comfort; for our good Lord would not that the soul were affeared of this ugly sight." She knows her metaphysics:

> But I saw not sin: for I believe it hath no manner of substance nor no part of being, nor could it be known but by the pain that it is the cause of.
> And thus pain . . . purgeth and maketh us to know ourselves and to ask mercy . . . . he comforteth readily and sweetly, meaning thus: "It is sooth that sin is cause of all this pain; but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner /of/ thing shall be well." . . . . And in these words I saw a marvellous high privity hid in God, which privity he shall openly make known to us in Heaven: in which knowing we shall verily see the cause why he suffered sin to come. In which sight we shall endlessly joy in our Lord God.(97)

. . .

What are the practical consequences for the ordinary man who will accept the influence of Chesterton's philosophy of life?

He will accept that " . . . God . . . made good laughter . . . . "(98) and that " . . . God does mean a man to

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(96) JULIAN OF NORWICH, Revelations of Divine Love, 2nd ed., and with intro. by Dom Roger HUDLESTON, O.S.B., Westminster, Md., Newman, 1952, xxxviii, 178 p., p. 48.

(97) Ibid., p. 49.

(98) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Flying Inn, p. 73.

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have a little Fun . . . . "(99) and that: "Religion might approximately be defined as the power which makes us joyful about the things that matter."(100) The reason is that: "He who has seen the whole world hanging on a hair of the mercy of God . . . . does have some difficulty in taking them /ordinary social relations/ so seriously . . . . "(101)

A modern psychologist expresses it this way:

> In fact a case might be made for the potentially superior humor of the religious person who has settled once and for all what things are of ultimate value, sacred and untouchable, for then nothing else in the world need be taken seriously. He can readily concede that the bulk of worldly happenings are ludicrous, that men and women, including himself, are given to amusing vanities, actors on a stage set with human artifices. To him nothing in their coming and going is of consequence, except their ultimate salvation. Most things they do are merely laughable. Beyond the reach of humor lies one and only serious purpose to which humor must give way whenever the two are in conflict.(102)

Not only is humor a result of religion, but it is good for spiritual health, according to Chesterton:

> Fun is freedom; and in that sense is an end in itself. It concerns the man not as a worker but as a citizen, or even as a soul; and the soul in that sense is an end in itself. That a man shall have a reasonable amount of comedy and poetry and even fantasy in his

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(99) G. K. CHESTERTON, The Flying Inn, p. 67.

(100) IDEM, The Common Man, p. 138.

(101) IDEM, St. Francis of Assisi, pp. 78-79,

(102) Gordon W. ALLPORT, Personality, a Psychological Interpretation, N. Y., H. Holt and Co., (1937), xiv, 588 p., p. 226.

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> life is part of his spiritual health, which is for the service of God; and not merely for his mechanical health, which is now bound to the service of man.(103)

This humor of the truly Christian man takes an effort to acquire: "It is so easy to be solemn; it is so hard to be frivolous."(104) According to Chesterton, it is pagans and animals who are serious:

> I do not like seriousness. I think it is irreligious. Or, if you prefer the phrase, it is the fashion of all false religions. The man who takes everything seriously is the man who makes an idol of everything: he bows down to wood and stone until his limbs are as rooted as the roots of the tree or his head as fallen as the stone sunken by the roadside. It has often been discussed whether animals can laugh . . . . Broadly, it is true that all animals except Man are serious.(105)

The ancient Egyptians are examples of the pagan solemnity: "I think you will pass along many corriders of that coloured and almost cruel art before you see a man laughing. Their gods did not encourage them to laugh."(106)

The Middle Ages had the right idea about humor: "There is all the best of the Middle Ages in that; the idea of the great levellers, luck and laughter; the idea of a sense of humour defying and dominating hell."(107)

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(103) G. K. CHESTERTON, What I Saw in America, p. 150.

(104) IDEM, All Things Considered, p. 3.

(105) IDEM, Uses of Diversity, p. 1.

(106) Ibid., p. 3.

(107) IDEM, Alarms and Discursions, p. 33.

The "levellers" bring humility, a component of wonder:

> It is vain, then to object to "senseless jokes". The very definition of a joke is that it need have no sense except that one wild and supernatural sense which we call the sense of humour. Humour is meant, in a literal sense, to make game of man; that is, to dethrone him from his official dignity and hunt him like game. It is meant to remind us human beings that we have things about us as ungainly and ludicrous as the nose of the elephant or the neck of the giraffe. If laughter does not touch a sort of fundamental folly, it does not do its duty in bringing us back to an enormous and original simplicity. Nothing has been worse than the modern notion that a clever man can make a joke without taking part in it; without sharing in the general absurdity that such a situation creates. It is unpardonable conceit not to laugh at your own jokes. Joking is undignified; that is why it is good for one's soul. Do not fancy you can be a detached wit and avoid being a buffoon; you cannot. If you are the Court Jester you must be the Court Fool.(108)

With this humor and this humility we have at last become as little children, " . . . his delight day by day, Playing before him all the while, playing on the surface of the earth."(109) Sacred Scripture says this of Wisdom; and we are to be of Wisdom. Chesterton puts it this way:

> It might reasonably be maintained that the true object of human life is play. Earth is a task garden; heaven is a playground. To be at last in such secure innocence that one can juggle with the universe and the stars, to be so good that one can treat everything as a joke that may be, perhaps, the real end and final holiday of human souls.(110)

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(108) G. K. CHESTERTON, Alarms and Discursions, pp. 200-201.

(109) Proverbs 8, 30-31.

(110) G. K. CHESTERTON, All Things Considered, p. 72.

We have from Chesterton some more specific advice on how to meet the problem of evil in our own lives.

First of all, of course, we must develop our childlike spirit as recommended above; and especially those of us who are too much inclined to prideful and supercilious seriousness:

> It is not children who ought to read the words of Lewis Carroll . . . it is rather sages and grey-haired philosophers who ought to sit up all night reading Alice in Wonderland in order to study that darkest problem of metaphysics, the borderland between reason and unreason, and the nature of the most erratic of spiritual forces, humour, which eternally dances between the two.(111)

Secondly, let us try to share our joys, but not our griefs:

> Though pain be stark and bitter
> And days in darkness creep
> Not to that depth I sink me
> That asks the world to weep.(112)

Thirdly, Chesterton advises us to avoid even the smallest faults:

> It is by no means easy to draw the line between light and heavy offence . . . . there are no faults . . . that we can afford to flatter or to let alone . . . . If flattered or let alone, our kindliest fault can destroy our kindliest virtue. A thing may begin as a very human weakness, and end as a very inhuman weakness . . . . the extremes of evil are much nearer than we think . . . . For the vices are very strangely in league, and encourage each other. A sober man may become a drunkard through being a coward. A brave

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(111) G. K. CHESTERTON, Lunacy and Letters, p. 26.

(112) G. K. CHESTERTON quoted in Maisie Ward, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, p. 447.

> man may become a coward through being a drunkard . . . . There is nothing that can be neglected; there is no such thing . . . as a peccadillo.(113)

Fourthly, we should practice that valor which is an effect of wonder and have the greatest zeal for the promotion of good: "Newman, I think, remarked very truly that good generally fails by falling short of itself and evil by overleaping itself."(114)

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(113) G. K. CHESTERTON, Charles Dickens, The Last of the Great Men, pp. 147-148.

(114) IDEM, Avowals and Denials, p. 221.

SUMMARY

It has been the aim of this paper to gather together the scattered references in the works of Chesterton to the concept of wonder and to correlate them, and analyze and synthesize them into one solid body of what may loosely be called the philosophy of the virtue of wonder. As can readily be seen from the various footnotes throughout the work, there was no attempt whatever on the part of Chesterton to unify his thought on this matter; yet we have seen that he considered the dissemination of his thought on this particular subject the most significant effort of his life.

We began with a short summary of the life and works of Chesterton, his conversion, his character, and his style, some estimate of the value of his genius, his position as a philosopher, and a note on the consistency of his thought throughout his life.

In the next chapter we began our exploration of the concept of wonder and suggested that in a certain sense, since it is an analogous term, it could be called a virtue: a virtue by reason of the fact that it is not wonder at extraordinary things with which we are here concerned, but a voluntary habit of wonder at the ordinary things of life; and such voluntary stimulation of wonder meets with great difficulty after the period of childhood when such wonder is natural and effortless.

Imitating St. Thomas' presentation of the parts of virtues, we proceeded to delineate the parts of the "virtue" of wonder. We found that there seem to be six integral parts of wonder: observation, enthusiasm, the love of things, religious awe, humility, and childlikeness.

First comes the element of observation, really seeing what we look at; secondly, enthusiasm, a quality of our observation which renders us susceptible to surprise and excitement; thirdly, the love of things, an imitation of the love God has for the things of creation and rejection of Manicheism; fourthly, the spirit of religious awe which accompanies our observation in the light of the recognition of the Source of all these things; fifthly, humility, an acknowledgment of the contingency of all things, including self; sixthly, childlikeness, the catalytic agent rendering easy the blending of all components in the virtue of wonder.

Next we considered the effects of wonder: first, gratitude and praise of the Creator; secondly, joy; thirdly, camaraderie and the similar, but broader effect of the democratic spirit; and finally, valor, or the willingness to fight for things we value. We tried to show how certain of the integral parts of wonder were productive of these effects.

Next we come to a chapter on the means to acquire the habit of wonder. We find that leisure is necessary, plus the development of the contemplative spirit. Thirdly, we develop

the habit through the stimulation of the imagination, stirring up in our souls the spirit of romance and adventure in life; this we accomplish especially through the arts and literature. The fourth means to wonder is to awaken appreciation of things through limitation: first, by realizing the value of things through a comprehension of their contingency; secondly, by realizing the possibility of loss of things we have; and thirdly, by mortification or self-denial. The fifth means to awaken the spirit of wonder is by a consideration of our exile condition; for wonder is awakened by strangeness. Sixthly, we can aid the process by travel; for travel awakens appreciation of the home soil. Lastly, scientific studies are an aid; we wonder at scientific wonders.

We now arrive at the negative aspect of our problem: here we consider the enemies of wonder and how they are to be conquered. First we have scepticism, an obvious enemy of wonder, for it is against the very beginnings of wonder which must come from observation, which is useless for the sceptic or for his close friends, the subjectivist or idealist. Creed, dogma, the acceptance of self-evident principles, are the answers to the sceptic. We have in our text summarized the many arguments of Chesterton against the sceptic.

The relativist is found in the bad company of these enemies of wonder. The answer to the relativist is definite

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standards and a dogmatic philosophy. Pragmatism or utilitarianism ally themselves with the proponents of relativism; for they are all against a definite body of solid, unchangeable principles; but Chesterton insists on the importance of abstract thought, of definition and distinction, of a clear philosophy of life. He explains how he found this philosophy of life; and that it was the philosophy of St. Thomas and the philosophy of the Church.

Evolutionism, with its belief in inevitable progress, and determinism, with its denial of free will, are both enemies of wonder. Far from stimulating wonder, these beliefs have led to pessimism and despair. Chesterton was an ardent foe of evolutionism and offers many arguments against it. Rather than blind belief in "progress" we need standards, a direction, an ideal, an end, a concept of what is good and what is best. The conservative is, because of his respect for tradition and knowledge of history, the true progressive.

In this connection we have a corollary about education and its true mission.

The next enemy of wonder is pride. Obviously pride is especially opposed to that element of wonder called humility. There is a natural affinity between pride and other foes of wonder, scepticism and idealism. Especially prone to pride and therefore immune to wonder are certain classes of people besides those who profess these "isms": philanthropists,

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those who try to be "modern" and fashionable at all times, the esoteric groups in religion, those in religion who consider themselves the predestined, and finally, pagans. Humility has many advantages; while pride is opposed to the parts and the effects of wonder.

The last enemy of wonder to be considered is pessimism. In this chapter we considered Chesterton's personal bout with this pessimistic spirit in his days of youth and we see the connection with this personal experience and his development of the "wonder" philosophy. He relates pessimism to paganism, to pantheism (Buddhism), Manicheism, Calvinism, Freudianism, Puritanism, and even the Prohibition movement.

We must try to answer the problem of evil in the world, this problem which gives rise to pessimism, the enemy of wonder. Stoics, Christian Scientists, Universalists, the sentimental criminologists, all the false optimists, fail in their attempts to solve the problem of evil. The true solution is a correct optimism, based on the recognition of sin, especially of original sin. We can promote such optimism in our souls especially by being extroverts and practicing wonder, and by being positive in our thinking.

Pain in the world is an answer to the philosophic idealist and to pride. The ultimate answer to evil is shrouded in mystery; but Chesterton suggests a greater appreciation of God as the source of risibility.

To meet the problem of evil in our own lives, Chesterton

suggests that we develop our childlike spirit, that we share our joys, but not our griefs, that we try to avoid even the smallest faults, and that we practice that valor which is an effect of wonder.

Let us finish with an attempt to present a definition of wonder as understood by Chesterton: wonder is the habit of aweful and humble observation of ordinary things and love of being in a spirit of enthusiastic childlikeness. In a more comprehensive way, we may say that wonder is childlike enthusiastic observation and love of being extended into adult life in a spirit of awed humility which begets joy and gratitude, valor, and the spirit of democracy; and which defeats the spirit of scepticism, pessimism, and pride.

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CONCLUSION

We have seen that Chesterton was much impressed with the necessity of wonder for the modern world. Our civilization must be preserved from the fatigue and boredom which spell calamity for a culture.

> Unless we can bring man back to enjoying the daily life, which moderns call a dull life, our whole civilization will be in ruins . . . . modern men have utterly lost the joy of life.(1)

He goes on to say that if we cannot

> make daybreak and daily bread and the creative secrets of labour interesting in themselves, there will fall on all our civilisation a fatigue, which is the one disease from which civilisations do not recover.(2)

We see how the Church, guided as it is by the Holy Spirit, comes forth in every age with the answer to the challenge of that age. We see, for example, how the emphasis on the doctrine of the Mystical Body has been an answer to the "Workers of the world, unite" of the false prophets of Communism. At various times, too, to answer a definite need in a certain era in history, God's Providence raises up a religious order or a saint or teacher or leader of some kind to combat the evils of the time.

In like manner, we feel that Chesterton, with his

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, G. K. Chesterton - An Anthology, selected by D. B. Wyndham Lewis, p. 234.

(2) Ibid., pp. 234-235.

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unique emphasis on the spirit of wonder, stands like a great spiritual warrior to do battle against the tendency to weariness in the fight of good against evil, a fight which is being carried on so fiercely and decisively today. In the early centuries of Christianity warriors fighting on the side of right were buoyed up in their difficulties by those very extraordinary gifts, the charismata, and by frequent manifestation of the power of God in many miracles. The number of such external, visible proofs of God's sustaining hand has diminished in the course of ages if we consider them in proportion to the number of Christians. Many diseases which would have been hopeless in prognosis in the past except for an intervening miracle are now cured by new medicines, treatments, or apparatus devised by scientists and permitted in the Providence of God slowly to lift the primeval curse in its effects on the life of fallen man. Many inventions of modern times have lightened the burden of work and suffering that were the results of the fall of man.

Since God's Providence now takes care of things in a less evidently miraculous manner, but still through what are often called the "miracles" of modern science, the wonder aroused at one time by the "mirum" of miracles based on the suspension of the laws of nature must now be awakened by the "mirum" based not on the suspension of the laws of nature, but upon the more complete "subduing" of nature by man, the fuller knowledge and use of scientific laws to promote a

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marvellous mode of living for the modern man. As Chesterton said, there is no lack of wonders, only a lack of wonder.

The goodness of God manifested in the order of Divine Providence decreeing the unfolding of all these wonderful things for the benefit of man will be recognized and appreciated and fittingly acclaimed only by those in the modern world who can catch a fleeting vision, at least, of what Chesterton meant, and who can form, with the help of the grace of God, this disposition to wonder in their own hearts and help to spread it in the hearts of others.

> Whatever you do, don't give up: or listen to cynicism, which is dead - least of all to young cynics, who were born dead. Men have at last grown weary of weariness: and there are limits to the patience of God. What people laughed at as Romance, which is simply Life, is going to return. You will live to see that I was right: though I may not.(1)

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(1) G. K. CHESTERTON, in a letter to a friend quoted in Maisie Ward, The Return to Chesterton, p. 246.

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