

GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

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All Things Considered

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Содержание

THE CASE FOR THE EPHEMERAL	4
COCKNEYS AND THEIR JOKES	11
THE FALLACY OF SUCCESS	20
ON RUNNING AFTER ONE'S HAT	28
THE VOTE AND THE HOUSE	33
CONCEIT AND CARICATURE	41
PATRIOTISM AND SPORT	48
AN ESSAY ON TWO CITIES	54
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	59

G. K. Chesterton

All Things Considered

THE CASE FOR THE EPHEMERAL

I cannot understand the people who take literature seriously; but I can love them, and I do. Out of my love I warn them to keep clear of this book. It is a collection of crude and shapeless papers upon current or rather flying subjects; and they must be published pretty much as they stand. They were written, as a rule, at the last moment; they were handed in the moment before it was too late, and I do not think that our commonwealth would have been shaken to its foundations if they had been handed in the moment after. They must go out now, with all their imperfections on their head, or rather on mine; for their vices are too vital to be improved with a blue pencil, or with anything I can think of, except dynamite.

Their chief vice is that so many of them are very serious; because I had no time to make them flippant. It is so easy to be solemn; it is so hard to be frivolous. Let any honest reader shut his eyes for a few moments, and approaching the secret tribunal of his soul, ask himself whether he would really rather be asked in the next two hours to write the front page of the *Times*, which is full of long leading articles, or the front page of *Tit-Bits*, which is

full of short jokes. If the reader is the fine conscientious fellow I take him for, he will at once reply that he would rather on the spur of the moment write ten *Times* articles than one *Tit-Bits* joke. Responsibility, a heavy and cautious responsibility of speech, is the easiest thing in the world; anybody can do it. That is why so many tired, elderly, and wealthy men go in for politics. They are responsible, because they have not the strength of mind left to be irresponsible. It is more dignified to sit still than to dance the Barn Dance. It is also easier. So in these easy pages I keep myself on the whole on the level of the *Times*: it is only occasionally that I leap upwards almost to the level of *Tit-Bits*.

I resume the defence of this indefensible book. These articles have another disadvantage arising from the scurry in which they were written; they are too long-winded and elaborate. One of the great disadvantages of hurry is that it takes such a long time. If I have to start for High-gate this day week, I may perhaps go the shortest way. If I have to start this minute, I shall almost certainly go the longest. In these essays (as I read them over) I feel frightfully annoyed with myself for not getting to the point more quickly; but I had not enough leisure to be quick. There are several maddening cases in which I took two or three pages in attempting to describe an attitude of which the essence could be expressed in an epigram; only there was no time for epigrams. I do not repent of one shade of opinion here expressed; but I feel that they might have been expressed so much more briefly and precisely. For instance,

these pages contain a sort of recurring protest against the boast of certain writers that they are merely recent. They brag that their philosophy of the universe is the last philosophy or the new philosophy, or the advanced and progressive philosophy. I have said much against a mere modernism. When I use the word "modernism," I am not alluding specially to the current quarrel in the Roman Catholic Church, though I am certainly astonished at any intellectual group accepting so weak and unphilosophical a name. It is incomprehensible to me that any thinker can calmly call himself a modernist; he might as well call himself a Thursdayite. But apart altogether from that particular disturbance, I am conscious of a general irritation expressed against the people who boast of their advancement and modernity in the discussion of religion. But I never succeeded in saying the quite clear and obvious thing that is really the matter with modernism. 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. Similarly I find that I have tried

in these pages to express the real objection to philanthropists and have not succeeded. I have not seen the quite simple objection to the causes advocated by certain wealthy idealists; causes of which the cause called teetotalism is the strongest case. I have used many abusive terms about the thing, calling it Puritanism, or superciliousness, or aristocracy; but I have not seen and stated the quite simple objection to philanthropy; which is that it is religious persecution. Religious persecution does not consist in thumbscrews or fires of Smithfield; the essence of religious persecution is this: that the man who happens to have material power in the State, either by wealth or by official position, should govern his fellow-citizens not according to their religion or philosophy, but according to his own. If, for instance, there is such a thing as a vegetarian nation; if there is a great united mass of men who wish to live by the vegetarian morality, then I say in the emphatic words of the arrogant French marquis before the French Revolution, "Let them eat grass." Perhaps that French oligarch was a humanitarian; most oligarchs are. Perhaps when he told the peasants to eat grass he was recommending to them the hygienic simplicity of a vegetarian restaurant. But that is an irrelevant, though most fascinating, speculation. The point here is that if a nation is really vegetarian let its government force upon it the whole horrible weight of vegetarianism. Let its government give the national guests a State vegetarian banquet. Let its government, in the most literal and awful sense of the words, give them beans. That sort of

tyranny is all very well; for it is the people tyrannising over all the persons. But "temperance reformers" are like a small group of vegetarians who should silently and systematically act on an ethical assumption entirely unfamiliar to the mass of the people. They would always be giving peerages to greengrocers. They would always be appointing Parliamentary Commissions to enquire into the private life of butchers. Whenever they found a man quite at their mercy, as a pauper or a convict or a lunatic, they would force him to add the final touch to his inhuman isolation by becoming a vegetarian. All the meals for school children will be vegetarian meals. All the State public houses will be vegetarian public houses. There is a very strong case for vegetarianism as compared with teetotalism. Drinking one glass of beer cannot by any philosophy be drunkenness; but killing one animal can, by this philosophy, be murder. The objection to both processes is not that the two creeds, teetotal and vegetarian, are not admissible; it is simply that they are not admitted. The thing is religious persecution because it is not based on the existing religion of the democracy. These people ask the poor to accept in practice what they know perfectly well that the poor would not accept in theory. That is the very definition of religious persecution. I was against the Tory attempt to force upon ordinary Englishmen a Catholic theology in which they do not believe. I am even more against the attempt to force upon them a Mohamedan morality which they actively deny.

Again, in the case of anonymous journalism I seem to

have said a great deal without getting out the point very clearly. Anonymous journalism is dangerous, and is poisonous in our existing life simply because it is so rapidly becoming an anonymous life. That is the horrible thing about our contemporary atmosphere. Society is becoming a secret society. The modern tyrant is evil because of his elusiveness. He is more nameless than his slave. He is not more of a bully than the tyrants of the past; but he is more of a coward. The rich publisher may treat the poor poet better or worse than the old master workman treated the old apprentice. But the apprentice ran away and the master ran after him. Nowadays it is the poet who pursues and tries in vain to fix the fact of responsibility. It is the publisher who runs away. The clerk of Mr. Solomon gets the sack: the beautiful Greek slave of the Sultan Suliman also gets the sack; or the sack gets her. But though she is concealed under the black waves of the Bosphorus, at least her destroyer is not concealed. He goes behind golden trumpets riding on a white elephant. But in the case of the clerk it is almost as difficult to know where the dismissal comes from as to know where the clerk goes to. It may be Mr. Solomon or Mr. Solomon's manager, or Mr. Solomon's rich aunt in Cheltenham, or Mr. Solomon's rich creditor in Berlin. The elaborate machinery which was once used to make men responsible is now used solely in order to shift the responsibility. People talk about the pride of tyrants; but we in this age are not suffering from the pride of tyrants. We are suffering from the shyness of tyrants; from the shrinking modesty

of tyrants. Therefore we must not encourage leader-writers to be shy; we must not inflame their already exaggerated modesty. Rather we must attempt to lure them to be vain and ostentatious; so that through ostentation they may at last find their way to honesty.

The last indictment against this book is the worst of all. It is simply this: that if all goes well this book will be unintelligible gibberish. For it is mostly concerned with attacking attitudes which are in their nature accidental and incapable of enduring. Brief as is the career of such a book as this, it may last just twenty minutes longer than most of the philosophies that it attacks. In the end it will not matter to us whether we wrote well or ill; whether we fought with flails or reeds. It will matter to us greatly on what side we fought.

COCKNEYS AND THEIR JOKES

A writer in the *Yorkshire Evening Post* is very angry indeed with my performances in this column. His precise terms of reproach are, "Mr. G. K. Chesterton is not a humourist: not even a Cockney humourist." I do not mind his saying that I am not a humourist – in which (to tell the truth) I think he is quite right. But I do resent his saying that I am not a Cockney. That envenomed arrow, I admit, went home. If a French writer said of me, "He is no metaphysician: not even an English metaphysician," I could swallow the insult to my metaphysics, but I should feel angry about the insult to my country. So I do not urge that I am a humourist; but I do insist that I am a Cockney. If I were a humourist, I should certainly be a Cockney humourist; if I were a saint, I should certainly be a Cockney saint. I need not recite the splendid catalogue of Cockney saints who have written their names on our noble old City churches. I need not trouble you with the long list of the Cockney humourists who have discharged their bills (or failed to discharge them) in our noble old City taverns. We can weep together over the pathos of the poor Yorkshireman, whose county has never produced some humour not intelligible to the rest of the world. And we can smile together when he says that somebody or other is "not even" a Cockney humourist like Samuel Johnson or Charles Lamb. It is surely sufficiently obvious that all the best humour that exists in

our language is Cockney humour. Chaucer was a Cockney; he had his house close to the Abbey. Dickens was a Cockney; he said he could not think without the London streets. The London taverns heard always the quaintest conversation, whether it was Ben Johnson's at the Mermaid or Sam Johnson's at the Cock. Even in our own time it may be noted that the most vital and genuine humour is still written about London. Of this type is the mild and humane irony which marks Mr. Pett Ridge's studies of the small grey streets. Of this type is the simple but smashing laughter of the best tales of Mr. W. W. Jacobs, telling of the smoke and sparkle of the Thames. No; I concede that I am not a Cockney humourist. No; I am not worthy to be. Some time, after sad and strenuous after-lives; some time, after fierce and apocalyptic incarnations; in some strange world beyond the stars, I may become at last a Cockney humourist. In that potential paradise I may walk among the Cockney humourists, if not an equal, at least a companion. I may feel for a moment on my shoulder the hearty hand of Dryden and thread the labyrinths of the sweet insanity of Lamb. But that could only be if I were not only much cleverer, but much better than I am. Before I reach that sphere I shall have left behind, perhaps, the sphere that is inhabited by angels, and even passed that which is appropriated exclusively to the use of Yorkshiremen.

No; London is in this matter attacked upon its strongest ground. London is the largest of the bloated modern cities; London is the smokiest; London is the dirtiest; London is, if

you will, the most sombre; London is, if you will, the most miserable. But London is certainly the most amusing and the most amused. You may prove that we have the most tragedy; the fact remains that we have the most comedy, that we have the most farce. We have at the very worst a splendid hypocrisy of humour. We conceal our sorrow behind a screaming derision. You speak of people who laugh through their tears; it is our boast that we only weep through our laughter. There remains always this great boast, perhaps the greatest boast that is possible to human nature. I mean the great boast that the most unhappy part of our population is also the most hilarious part. The poor can forget that social problem which we (the moderately rich) ought never to forget. Blessed are the poor; for they alone have not the poor always with them. The honest poor can sometimes forget poverty. The honest rich can never forget it.

I believe firmly in the value of all vulgar notions, especially of vulgar jokes. When once you have got hold of a vulgar joke, you may be certain that you have got hold of a subtle and spiritual idea. The men who made the joke saw something deep which they could not express except by something silly and emphatic. They saw something delicate which they could only express by something indelicate. I remember that Mr. Max Beerbohm (who has every merit except democracy) attempted to analyse the jokes at which the mob laughs. He divided them into three sections: jokes about bodily humiliation, jokes about things alien, such as foreigners, and jokes about bad cheese. Mr.

Max Beerbohm thought he understood the first two forms; but I am not sure that he did. In order to understand vulgar humour it is not enough to be humorous. One must also be vulgar, as I am. And in the first case it is surely obvious that it is not merely at the fact of something being hurt that we laugh (as I trust we do) when a Prime Minister sits down on his hat. If that were so we should laugh whenever we saw a funeral. We do not laugh at the mere fact of something falling down; there is nothing humorous about leaves falling or the sun going down. When our house falls down we do not laugh. All the birds of the air might drop around us in a perpetual shower like a hailstorm without arousing a smile. If you really ask yourself why we laugh at a man sitting down suddenly in the street you will discover that the reason is not only recondite, but ultimately religious. All the jokes about men sitting down on their hats are really theological jokes; they are concerned with the Dual Nature of Man. They refer to the primary paradox that man is superior to all the things around him and yet is at their mercy.

Quite equally subtle and spiritual is the idea at the back of laughing at foreigners. It concerns the almost torturing truth of a thing being like oneself and yet not like oneself. Nobody laughs at what is entirely foreign; nobody laughs at a palm tree. But it is funny to see the familiar image of God disguised behind the black beard of a Frenchman or the black face of a Negro. There is nothing funny in the sounds that are wholly inhuman, the howling of wild beasts or of the wind. But if a man begins to talk like

oneself, but all the syllables come out different, then if one is a man one feels inclined to laugh, though if one is a gentleman one resists the inclination.

Mr. Max Beerbohm, I remember, professed to understand the first two forms of popular wit, but said that the third quite stumped him. He could not see why there should be anything funny about bad cheese. I can tell him at once. He has missed the idea because it is subtle and philosophical, and he was looking for something ignorant and foolish. Bad cheese is funny because it is (like the foreigner or the man fallen on the pavement) the type of the transition or transgression across a great mystical boundary. Bad cheese symbolises the change from the inorganic to the organic. Bad cheese symbolises the startling prodigy of matter taking on vitality. It symbolises the origin of life itself. And it is only about such solemn matters as the origin of life that the democracy condescends to joke. Thus, for instance, the democracy jokes about marriage, because marriage is a part of mankind. But the democracy would never deign to joke about Free Love, because Free Love is a piece of priggishness.

As a matter of fact, it will be generally found that the popular joke is not true to the letter, but is true to the spirit. The vulgar joke is generally in the oddest way the truth and yet not the fact. For instance, it is not in the least true that mothers-in-law are as a class oppressive and intolerable; most of them are both devoted and useful. All the mothers-in-law I have ever had were admirable. Yet the legend of the comic papers is profoundly true.

It draws attention to the fact that it is much harder to be a nice mother-in-law than to be nice in any other conceivable relation of life. The caricatures have drawn the worst mother-in-law a monster, by way of expressing the fact that the best mother-in-law is a problem. The same is true of the perpetual jokes in comic papers about shrewish wives and henpecked husbands. It is all a frantic exaggeration, but it is an exaggeration of a truth; whereas all the modern mouthings about oppressed women are the exaggerations of a falsehood. If you read even the best of the intellectuals of to-day you will find them saying that in the mass of the democracy the woman is the chattel of her lord, like his bath or his bed. But if you read the comic literature of the democracy you will find that the lord hides under the bed to escape from the wrath of his chattel. This is not the fact, but it is much nearer the truth. Every man who is married knows quite well, not only that he does not regard his wife as a chattel, but that no man can conceivably ever have done so. The joke stands for an ultimate truth, and that is a subtle truth. It is one not very easy to state correctly. It can, perhaps, be most correctly stated by saying that, even if the man is the head of the house, he knows he is the figurehead.

But the vulgar comic papers are so subtle and true that they are even prophetic. If you really want to know what is going to happen to the future of our democracy, do not read the modern sociological prophecies, do not read even Mr. Wells's Utopias for this purpose, though you should certainly read them if you

are fond of good honesty and good English. If you want to know what will happen, study the pages of *Snaps* or *Patchy Bits* as if they were the dark tablets graven with the oracles of the gods. For, mean and gross as they are, in all seriousness, they contain what is entirely absent from all Utopias and all the sociological conjectures of our time: they contain some hint of the actual habits and manifest desires of the English people. If we are really to find out what the democracy will ultimately do with itself, we shall surely find it, not in the literature which studies the people, but in the literature which the people studies.

I can give two chance cases in which the common or Cockney joke was a much better prophecy than the careful observations of the most cultured observer. When England was agitated, previous to the last General Election, about the existence of Chinese labour, there was a distinct difference between the tone of the politicians and the tone of the populace. The politicians who disapproved of Chinese labour were most careful to explain that they did not in any sense disapprove of Chinese. According to them, it was a pure question of legal propriety, of whether certain clauses in the contract of indenture were not inconsistent with our constitutional traditions: according to them, the case would have been the same if the people had been Kaffirs or Englishmen. It all sounded wonderfully enlightened and lucid; and in comparison the popular joke looked, of course, very poor. For the popular joke against the Chinese labourers was simply that they were Chinese; it was an objection to an alien type; the

popular papers were full of gibes about pigtailed and yellow faces. It seemed that the Liberal politicians were raising an intellectual objection to a doubtful document of State; while it seemed that the Radical populace were merely roaring with idiotic laughter at the sight of a Chinaman's clothes. But the popular instinct was justified, for the vices revealed were Chinese vices.

But there is another case more pleasant and more up to date. The popular papers always persisted in representing the New Woman or the Suffragette as an ugly woman, fat, in spectacles, with bulging clothes, and generally falling off a bicycle. As a matter of plain external fact, there was not a word of truth in this. The leaders of the movement of female emancipation are not at all ugly; most of them are extraordinarily good-looking. Nor are they at all indifferent to art or decorative costume; many of them are alarmingly attached to these things. Yet the popular instinct was right. For the popular instinct was that in this movement, rightly or wrongly, there was an element of indifference to female dignity, of a quite new willingness of women to be grotesque. These women did truly despise the pontifical quality of woman. And in our streets and around our Parliament we have seen the stately woman of art and culture turn into the comic woman of *Comic Bits*. And whether we think the exhibition justifiable or not, the prophecy of the comic papers is justified: the healthy and vulgar masses were conscious of a hidden enemy to their traditions who has now come out into the daylight, that the scriptures might be fulfilled. For the two things that a healthy

person hates most between heaven and hell are a woman who is not dignified and a man who is.

THE FALLACY OF SUCCESS

There has appeared in our time a particular class of books and articles which I sincerely and solemnly think may be called the silliest ever known among men. They are much more wild than the wildest romances of chivalry and much more dull than the dullest religious tract. Moreover, the romances of chivalry were at least about chivalry; the religious tracts are about religion. But these things are about nothing; they are about what is called Success. On every bookstall, in every magazine, you may find works telling people how to succeed. They are books showing men how to succeed in everything; they are written by men who cannot even succeed in writing books. To begin with, of course, there is no such thing as Success. Or, if you like to put it so, there is nothing that is not successful. That a thing is successful merely means that it is; a millionaire is successful in being a millionaire and a donkey in being a donkey. Any live man has succeeded in living; any dead man may have succeeded in committing suicide. But, passing over the bad logic and bad philosophy in the phrase, we may take it, as these writers do, in the ordinary sense of success in obtaining money or worldly position. These writers profess to tell the ordinary man how he may succeed in his trade or speculation – how, if he is a builder, he may succeed as a builder; how, if he is a stockbroker, he may succeed as a stockbroker. They profess to show him how, if he is a grocer,

he may become a sporting yachtsman; how, if he is a tenth-rate journalist, he may become a peer; and how, if he is a German Jew, he may become an Anglo-Saxon. This is a definite and business-like proposal, and I really think that the people who buy these books (if any people do buy them) have a moral, if not a legal, right to ask for their money back. Nobody would dare to publish a book about electricity which literally told one nothing about electricity; no one would dare to publish an article on botany which showed that the writer did not know which end of a plant grew in the earth. Yet our modern world is full of books about Success and successful people which literally contain no kind of idea, and scarcely any kind of verbal sense.

It is perfectly obvious that in any decent occupation (such as bricklaying or writing books) there are only two ways (in any special sense) of succeeding. One is by doing very good work, the other is by cheating. Both are much too simple to require any literary explanation. If you are in for the high jump, either jump higher than any one else, or manage somehow to pretend that you have done so. If you want to succeed at whist, either be a good whist-player, or play with marked cards. You may want a book about jumping; you may want a book about whist; you may want a book about cheating at whist. But you cannot want a book about Success. Especially you cannot want a book about Success such as those which you can now find scattered by the hundred about the book-market. You may want to jump or to play cards; but you do not want to read wandering statements to the effect

that jumping is jumping, or that games are won by winners. If these writers, for instance, said anything about success in jumping it would be something like this: "The jumper must have a clear aim before him. He must desire definitely to jump higher than the other men who are in for the same competition. He must let no feeble feelings of mercy (sneaked from the sickening Little Englanders and Pro-Boers) prevent him from trying to *do his best*. He must remember that a competition in jumping is distinctly competitive, and that, as Darwin has gloriously demonstrated, **THE WEAKEST GO TO THE WALL.**" That is the kind of thing the book would say, and very useful it would be, no doubt, if read out in a low and tense voice to a young man just about to take the high jump. Or suppose that in the course of his intellectual rambles the philosopher of Success dropped upon our other case, that of playing cards, his bracing advice would run – "In playing cards it is very necessary to avoid the mistake (commonly made by maudlin humanitarians and Free Traders) of permitting your opponent to win the game. You must have grit and snap and go *in to win*. The days of idealism and superstition are over. We live in a time of science and hard common sense, and it has now been definitely proved that in any game where two are playing **IF ONE DOES NOT WIN THE OTHER WILL.**" It is all very stirring, of course; but I confess that if I were playing cards I would rather have some decent little book which told me the rules of the game. Beyond the rules of the game it is all a question either of talent or dishonesty; and I will undertake to

provide either one or the other – which, it is not for me to say.

Turning over a popular magazine, I find a queer and amusing example. There is an article called "The Instinct that Makes People Rich." It is decorated in front with a formidable portrait of Lord Rothschild. There are many definite methods, honest and dishonest, which make people rich; the only "instinct" I know of which does it is that instinct which theological Christianity crudely describes as "the sin of avarice." That, however, is beside the present point. I wish to quote the following exquisite paragraphs as a piece of typical advice as to how to succeed. It is so practical; it leaves so little doubt about what should be our next step —

"The name of Vanderbilt is synonymous with wealth gained by modern enterprise. 'Cornelius,' the founder of the family, was the first of the great American magnates of commerce. He started as the son of a poor farmer; he ended as a millionaire twenty times over.

"He had the money-making instinct. He seized his opportunities, the opportunities that were given by the application of the steam-engine to ocean traffic, and by the birth of railway locomotion in the wealthy but undeveloped United States of America, and consequently he amassed an immense fortune.

"Now it is, of course, obvious that we cannot all follow exactly in the footsteps of this great railway monarch. The precise opportunities that fell to him do not occur to us. Circumstances

have changed. But, although this is so, still, in our own sphere and in our own circumstances, we *can* follow his general methods; we can seize those opportunities that are given us, and give ourselves a very fair chance of attaining riches."

In such strange utterances we see quite clearly what is really at the bottom of all these articles and books. It is not mere business; it is not even mere cynicism. It is mysticism; the horrible mysticism of money. The writer of that passage did not really have the remotest notion of how Vanderbilt made his money, or of how anybody else is to make his. He does, indeed, conclude his remarks by advocating some scheme; but it has nothing in the world to do with Vanderbilt. He merely wished to prostrate himself before the mystery of a millionaire. For when we really worship anything, we love not only its clearness but its obscurity. We exult in its very invisibility. Thus, for instance, when a man is in love with a woman he takes special pleasure in the fact that a woman is unreasonable. Thus, again, the very pious poet, celebrating his Creator, takes pleasure in saying that God moves in a mysterious way. Now, the writer of the paragraph which I have quoted does not seem to have had anything to do with a god, and I should not think (judging by his extreme unpracticality) that he had ever been really in love with a woman. But the thing he does worship – Vanderbilt – he treats in exactly this mystical manner. He really revels in the fact his deity Vanderbilt is keeping a secret from him. And it fills his soul with a sort of transport of cunning, an ecstasy of priestcraft,

that he should pretend to be telling to the multitude that terrible secret which he does not know.

Speaking about the instinct that makes people rich, the same writer remarks-

"In olden days its existence was fully understood. The Greeks enshrined it in the story of Midas, of the 'Golden Touch.' Here was a man who turned everything he laid his hands upon into gold. His life was a progress amidst riches. Out of everything that came in his way he created the precious metal. 'A foolish legend,' said the wiseacres of the Victorian age. 'A truth,' say we of to-day. We all know of such men. We are ever meeting or reading about such persons who turn everything they touch into gold. Success dogs their very footsteps. Their life's pathway leads unerringly upwards. They cannot fail."

Unfortunately, however, Midas could fail; he did. His path did not lead unerringly upward. He starved because whenever he touched a biscuit or a ham sandwich it turned to gold. That was the whole point of the story, though the writer has to suppress it delicately, writing so near to a portrait of Lord Rothschild. The old fables of mankind are, indeed, unfathomably wise; but we must not have them expurgated in the interests of Mr. Vanderbilt. We must not have King Midas represented as an example of success; he was a failure of an unusually painful kind. Also, he had the ears of an ass. Also (like most other prominent and wealthy persons) he endeavoured to conceal the fact. It was his barber (if I remember right) who had to be treated

on a confidential footing with regard to this peculiarity; and his barber, instead of behaving like a go-ahead person of the Succeed-at-all-costs school and trying to blackmail King Midas, went away and whispered this splendid piece of society scandal to the reeds, who enjoyed it enormously. It is said that they also whispered it as the winds swayed them to and fro. I look reverently at the portrait of Lord Rothschild; I read reverently about the exploits of Mr. Vanderbilt. I know that I cannot turn everything I touch to gold; but then I also know that I have never tried, having a preference for other substances, such as grass, and good wine. I know that these people have certainly succeeded in something; that they have certainly overcome somebody; I know that they are kings in a sense that no men were ever kings before; that they create markets and bestride continents. Yet it always seems to me that there is some small domestic fact that they are hiding, and I have sometimes thought I heard upon the wind the laughter and whisper of the reeds.

At least, let us hope that we shall all live to see these absurd books about Success covered with a proper derision and neglect. They do not teach people to be successful, but they do teach people to be snobbish; they do spread a sort of evil poetry of worldliness. The Puritans are always denouncing books that inflame lust; what shall we say of books that inflame the viler passions of avarice and pride? A hundred years ago we had the ideal of the Industrious Apprentice; boys were told that by thrift and work they would all become Lord Mayors. This was

fallacious, but it was manly, and had a minimum of moral truth. In our society, temperance will not help a poor man to enrich himself, but it may help him to respect himself. Good work will not make him a rich man, but good work may make him a good workman. The Industrious Apprentice rose by virtues few and narrow indeed, but still virtues. But what shall we say of the gospel preached to the new Industrious Apprentice; the Apprentice who rises not by his virtues, but avowedly by his vices?

ON RUNNING AFTER ONE'S HAT

I feel an almost savage envy on hearing that London has been flooded in my absence, while I am in the mere country. My own Battersea has been, I understand, particularly favoured as a meeting of the waters. Battersea was already, as I need hardly say, the most beautiful of human localities. Now that it has the additional splendour of great sheets of water, there must be something quite incomparable in the landscape (or waterscape) of my own romantic town. Battersea must be a vision of Venice. The boat that brought the meat from the butcher's must have shot along those lanes of rippling silver with the strange smoothness of the gondola. The greengrocer who brought cabbages to the corner of the Latchmere Road must have leant upon the oar with the unearthly grace of the gondolier. There is nothing so perfectly poetical as an island; and when a district is flooded it becomes an archipelago.

Some consider such romantic views of flood or fire slightly lacking in reality. But really this romantic view of such inconveniences is quite as practical as the other. The true optimist who sees in such things an opportunity for enjoyment is quite as logical and much more sensible than the ordinary "Indignant Ratepayer" who sees in them an opportunity for grumbling. Real pain, as in the case of being burnt at Smithfield or having a toothache, is a positive thing; it can be supported, but

scarcely enjoyed. But, after all, our toothaches are the exception, and as for being burnt at Smithfield, it only happens to us at the very longest intervals. And most of the inconveniences that make men swear or women cry are really sentimental or imaginative inconveniences – things altogether of the mind. For instance, we often hear grown-up people complaining of having to hang about a railway station and wait for a train. Did you ever hear a small boy complain of having to hang about a railway station and wait for a train? No; for to him to be inside a railway station is to be inside a cavern of wonder and a palace of poetical pleasures. Because to him the red light and the green light on the signal are like a new sun and a new moon. Because to him when the wooden arm of the signal falls down suddenly, it is as if a great king had thrown down his staff as a signal and started a shrieking tournament of trains. I myself am of little boys' habit in this matter. They also serve who only stand and wait for the two fifteen. Their meditations may be full of rich and fruitful things. Many of the most purple hours of my life have been passed at Clapham Junction, which is now, I suppose, under water. I have been there in many moods so fixed and mystical that the water might well have come up to my waist before I noticed it particularly. But in the case of all such annoyances, as I have said, everything depends upon the emotional point of view. You can safely apply the test to almost every one of the things that are currently talked of as the typical nuisance of daily life.

For instance, there is a current impression that it is unpleasant

to have to run after one's hat. Why should it be unpleasant to the well-ordered and pious mind? Not merely because it is running, and running exhausts one. The same people run much faster in games and sports. The same people run much more eagerly after an uninteresting; little leather ball than they will after a nice silk hat. There is an idea that it is humiliating to run after one's hat; and when people say it is humiliating they mean that it is comic. It certainly is comic; but man is a very comic creature, and most of the things he does are comic – eating, for instance. And the most comic things of all are exactly the things that are most worth doing – such as making love. A man running after a hat is not half so ridiculous as a man running after a wife.

Now a man could, if he felt rightly in the matter, run after his hat with the manliest ardour and the most sacred joy. He might regard himself as a jolly huntsman pursuing a wild animal, for certainly no animal could be wilder. In fact, I am inclined to believe that hat-hunting on windy days will be the sport of the upper classes in the future. There will be a meet of ladies and gentlemen on some high ground on a gusty morning. They will be told that the professional attendants have started a hat in such-and-such a thicket, or whatever be the technical term. Notice that this employment will in the fullest degree combine sport with humanitarianism. The hunters would feel that they were not inflicting pain. Nay, they would feel that they were inflicting pleasure, rich, almost riotous pleasure, upon the people who were looking on. When last I saw an old gentleman running after his

hat in Hyde Park, I told him that a heart so benevolent as his ought to be filled with peace and thanks at the thought of how much unaffected pleasure his every gesture and bodily attitude were at that moment giving to the crowd.

The same principle can be applied to every other typical domestic worry. A gentleman trying to get a fly out of the milk or a piece of cork out of his glass of wine often imagines himself to be irritated. Let him think for a moment of the patience of anglers sitting by dark pools, and let his soul be immediately irradiated with gratification and repose. Again, I have known some people of very modern views driven by their distress to the use of theological terms to which they attached no doctrinal significance, merely because a drawer was jammed tight and they could not pull it out. A friend of mine was particularly afflicted in this way. Every day his drawer was jammed, and every day in consequence it was something else that rhymes to it. But I pointed out to him that this sense of wrong was really subjective and relative; it rested entirely upon the assumption that the drawer could, should, and would come out easily. "But if," I said, "you picture to yourself that you are pulling against some powerful and oppressive enemy, the struggle will become merely exciting and not exasperating. Imagine that you are tugging up a lifeboat out of the sea. Imagine that you are roping up a fellow-creature out of an Alpine crevass. Imagine even that you are a boy again and engaged in a tug-of-war between French and English." Shortly after saying this I left him; but I have no doubt at all

that my words bore the best possible fruit. I have no doubt that every day of his life he hangs on to the handle of that drawer with a flushed face and eyes bright with battle, uttering encouraging shouts to himself, and seeming to hear all round him the roar of an applauding ring.

So I do not think that it is altogether fanciful or incredible to suppose that even the floods in London may be accepted and enjoyed poetically. Nothing beyond inconvenience seems really to have been caused by them; and inconvenience, as I have said, is only one aspect, and that the most unimaginative and accidental aspect of a really romantic situation. An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered. The water that girdled the houses and shops of London must, if anything, have only increased their previous witchery and wonder. For as the Roman Catholic priest in the story said: "Wine is good with everything except water," and on a similar principle, water is good with everything except wine.

THE VOTE AND THE HOUSE

Most of us will be canvassed soon, I suppose; some of us may even canvass. Upon which side, of course, nothing will induce me to state, beyond saying that by a remarkable coincidence it will in every case be the only side in which a high-minded, public-spirited, and patriotic citizen can take even a momentary interest. But the general question of canvassing itself, being a non-party question, is one which we may be permitted to approach. The rules for canvassers are fairly familiar to any one who has ever canvassed. They are printed on the little card which you carry about with you and lose. There is a statement, I think, that you must not offer a voter food or drink. However hospitable you may feel towards him in his own house, you must not carry his lunch about with you. You must not produce a veal cutlet from your tail-coat pocket. You must not conceal poached eggs about your person. You must not, like a kind of conjurer, produce baked potatoes from your hat. In short, the canvasser must not feed the voter in any way. Whether the voter is allowed to feed the canvasser, whether the voter may give the canvasser veal cutlets and baked potatoes, is a point of law on which I have never been able to inform myself. When I found myself canvassing a gentleman, I have sometimes felt tempted to ask him if there was any rule against his giving me food and drink; but the matter seemed a delicate one to approach. His attitude to me

also sometimes suggested a doubt as to whether he would, even if he could. But there are voters who might find it worth while to discover if there is any law against bribing a canvasser. They might bribe him to go away.

The second veto for canvassers which was printed on the little card said that you must not persuade any one to personate a voter. I have no idea what it means. To dress up as an average voter seems a little vague. There is no well-recognised uniform, as far as I know, with civic waistcoat and patriotic whiskers. The enterprise resolves itself into one somewhat similar to the enterprise of a rich friend of mine who went to a fancy-dress ball dressed up as a gentleman. Perhaps it means that there is a practice of personating some individual voter. The canvasser creeps to the house of his fellow-conspirator carrying a make-up in a bag. He produces from it a pair of white moustaches and a single eyeglass, which are sufficient to give the most commonplace person a startling resemblance to the Colonel at No. 80. Or he hurriedly affixes to his friend that large nose and that bald head which are all that is essential to an illusion of the presence of Professor Budger. I do not undertake to unravel these knots. I can only say that when I was a canvasser I was told by the little card, with every circumstance of seriousness and authority, that I was not to persuade anybody to personate a voter: and I can lay my hand upon my heart and affirm that I never did.

The third injunction on the card was one which seemed to me, if interpreted exactly and according to its words, to undermine

the very foundations of our politics. It told me that I must not "threaten a voter with any consequence whatever." No doubt this was intended to apply to threats of a personal and illegitimate character; as, for instance, if a wealthy candidate were to threaten to raise all the rents, or to put up a statue of himself. But as verbally and grammatically expressed, it certainly would cover those general threats of disaster to the whole community which are the main matter of political discussion. When a canvasser says that if the opposition candidate gets in the country will be ruined, he is threatening the voters with certain consequences. When the Free Trader says that if Tariffs are adopted the people in Brompton or Bayswater will crawl about eating grass, he is threatening them with consequences. When the Tariff Reformer says that if Free Trade exists for another year St. Paul's Cathedral will be a ruin and Ludgate Hill as deserted as Stonehenge, he is also threatening. And what is the good of being a Tariff Reformer if you can't say that? What is the use of being a politician or a Parliamentary candidate at all if one cannot tell the people that if the other man gets in, England will be instantly invaded and enslaved, blood be pouring down the Strand, and all the English ladies carried off into harems. But these things are, after all, consequences, so to speak.

The majority of refined persons in our day may generally be heard abusing the practice of canvassing. In the same way the majority of refined persons (commonly the same refined persons) may be heard abusing the practice of interviewing

celebrities. It seems a very singular thing to me that this refined world reserves all its indignation for the comparatively open and innocent element in both walks of life. There is really a vast amount of corruption and hypocrisy in our election politics; about the most honest thing in the whole mess is the canvassing. A man has not got a right to "nurse" a constituency with aggressive charities, to buy it with great presents of parks and libraries, to open vague vistas of future benevolence; all this, which goes on unrebuked, is bribery and nothing else. But a man has got the right to go to another free man and ask him with civility whether he will vote for him. The information can be asked, granted, or refused without any loss of dignity on either side, which is more than can be said of a park. It is the same with the place of interviewing in journalism. In a trade where there are labyrinths of insincerity, interviewing is about the most simple and the most sincere thing there is. The canvasser, when he wants to know a man's opinions, goes and asks him. It may be a bore; but it is about as plain and straight a thing as he could do. So the interviewer, when he wants to know a man's opinions, goes and asks him. Again, it may be a bore; but again, it is about as plain and straight as anything could be. But all the other real and systematic cynicisms of our journalism pass without being vituperated and even without being known – the financial motives of policy, the misleading posters, the suppression of just letters of complaint. A statement about a man may be infamously untrue, but it is read calmly. But a statement by a man to an

interviewer is felt as indefensibly vulgar. That the paper should misrepresent him is nothing; that he should represent himself is bad taste. The whole error in both cases lies in the fact that the refined persons are attacking politics and journalism on the ground of vulgarity. Of course, politics and journalism are, as it happens, very vulgar. But their vulgarity is not the worst thing about them. Things are so bad with both that by this time their vulgarity is the best thing about them. Their vulgarity is at least a noisy thing; and their great danger is that silence that always comes before decay. The conversational persuasion at elections is perfectly human and rational; it is the silent persuasions that are utterly damnable.

If it is true that the Commons' House will not hold all the Commons, it is a very good example of what we call the anomalies of the English Constitution. It is also, I think, a very good example of how highly undesirable those anomalies really are. Most Englishmen say that these anomalies do not matter; they are not ashamed of being illogical; they are proud of being illogical. Lord Macaulay (a very typical Englishman, romantic, prejudiced, poetical), Lord Macaulay said that he would not lift his hand to get rid of an anomaly that was not also a grievance. Many other sturdy romantic Englishmen say the same. They boast of our anomalies; they boast of our illogicality; they say it shows what a practical people we are. They are utterly wrong. Lord Macaulay was in this matter, as in a few others, utterly wrong. Anomalies do matter very much, and do a great deal

of harm; abstract illogicalities do matter a great deal, and do a great deal of harm. And this for a reason that any one at all acquainted with human nature can see for himself. All injustice begins in the mind. And anomalies accustom the mind to the idea of unreason and untruth. Suppose I had by some prehistoric law the power of forcing every man in Battersea to nod his head three times before he got out of bed. The practical politicians might say that this power was a harmless anomaly; that it was not a grievance. It could do my subjects no harm; it could do me no good. The people of Battersea, they would say, might safely submit to it. But the people of Battersea could not safely submit to it, for all that. If I had nodded their heads for them for fifty years I could cut off their heads for them at the end of it with immeasurably greater ease. For there would have permanently sunk into every man's mind the notion that it was a natural thing for me to have a fantastic and irrational power. They would have grown accustomed to insanity.

For, in order that men should resist injustice, something more is necessary than that they should think injustice unpleasant. They must think injustice *absurd*; above all, they must think it startling. They must retain the violence of a 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. The optimist Dickens has achieved more reforms than the pessimist Gissing. A man like Rousseau has far too rosy a theory of human nature; but he produces a revolution. A man like David Hume thinks that almost all things are depressing; but he is a Conservative, and wishes to keep them as they are. A man like Godwin believes existence to be kindly; but he is a rebel. A man like Carlyle believes existence to be cruel; but he is a Tory. 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 a startled indignation. When the pessimist looks at any infamy, it is to him, after all, only a repetition of the infamy of existence. The Court of Chancery is indefensible – like mankind. The Inquisition is abominable – like the universe. 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.

And it is the same with the relations of an anomaly to the logical mind. The pessimist resents evil (like Lord Macaulay) solely because it is a grievance. The optimist resents it also, because it is an anomaly; a contradiction to his conception of

the course of things. And it is not at all unimportant, but on the contrary most important, that this course of things in politics and elsewhere should be lucid, explicable and defensible. When people have got used to unreason they can no longer be startled at injustice. When people have grown familiar with an anomaly, they are prepared to that extent for a grievance; they may think the grievance grievous, but they can no longer think it strange. Take, if only as an excellent example, the very matter alluded to before; I mean the seats, or rather the lack of seats, in the House of Commons. Perhaps it is true that under the best conditions it would never happen that every member turned up. Perhaps a complete attendance would never actually be. But who can tell how much influence in keeping members away may have been exerted by this calm assumption that they would stop away? How can any man be expected to help to make a full attendance when he knows that a full attendance is actually forbidden? How can the men who make up the Chamber do their duty reasonably when the very men who built the House have not done theirs reasonably? If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle? And what if the remarks of the trumpet take this form, "I charge you as you love your King and country to come to this Council. And I know you won't."

CONCEIT AND CARICATURE

If a man must needs be conceited, it is certainly better that he should be conceited about some merits or talents that he does not really possess. For then his vanity remains more or less superficial; it remains a mere mistake of fact, like that of a man who thinks he inherits the royal blood or thinks he has an infallible system for Monte Carlo. Because the merit is an unreal merit, it does not corrupt or sophisticate his real merits. He is vain about the virtue he has not got; but he may be humble about the virtues that he has got. His truly honourable qualities remain in their primordial innocence; he cannot see them and he cannot spoil them. If a man's mind is erroneously possessed with the idea that he is a great violinist, that need not prevent his being a gentleman and an honest man. But if once his mind is possessed in any strong degree with the knowledge that he is a gentleman, he will soon cease to be one.

But there is a third kind of satisfaction of which I have noticed one or two examples lately – another kind of satisfaction which is neither a pleasure in the virtues that we do possess nor a pleasure in the virtues we do not possess. It is the pleasure which a man takes in the presence or absence of certain things in himself without ever adequately asking himself whether in his case they constitute virtues at all. A man will plume himself because he is not bad in some particular way, when the truth is that he is not

good enough to be bad in that particular way. Some priggish little clerk will say, "I have reason to congratulate myself that I am a civilised person, and not so bloodthirsty as the Mad Mullah." Somebody ought to say to him, "A really good man would be less bloodthirsty than the Mullah. But you are less bloodthirsty, not because you are more of a good man, but because you are a great deal less of a man. You are not bloodthirsty, not because you would spare your enemy, but because you would run away from him." Or again, some Puritan with a sullen type of piety would say, "I have reason to congratulate myself that I do not worship graven images like the old heathen Greeks." And again somebody ought to say to him, "The best religion may not worship graven images, because it may see beyond them. But if you do not worship graven images, it is only because you are mentally and morally quite incapable of graving them. True religion, perhaps, is above idolatry. But you are below idolatry. You are not holy enough yet to worship a lump of stone."

Mr. F. C. Gould, the brilliant and felicitous caricaturist, recently delivered a most interesting speech upon the nature and atmosphere of our modern English caricature. I think there is really very little to congratulate oneself about in the condition of English caricature. There are few causes for pride; probably the greatest cause for pride is Mr. F. C. Gould. But Mr. F. C. Gould, forbidden by modesty to adduce this excellent ground for optimism, fell back upon saying a thing which is said by numbers of other people, but has not perhaps been said lately with the full

authority of an eminent cartoonist. He said that he thought "that they might congratulate themselves that the style of caricature which found acceptance nowadays was very different from the lampoon of the old days." Continuing, he said, according to the newspaper report, "On looking back to the political lampoons of Rowlandson's and Gilray's time they would find them coarse and brutal. In some countries abroad still, 'even in America,' the method of political caricature was of the bludgeon kind. The fact was we had passed the bludgeon stage. If they were brutal in attacking a man, even for political reasons, they roused sympathy for the man who was attacked. What they had to do was to rub in the point they wanted to emphasise as gently as they could." (Laughter and applause.)

Anybody reading these words, and anybody who heard them, will certainly feel that there is in them a great deal of truth, as well as a great deal of geniality. But along with that truth and with that geniality there is a streak of that erroneous type of optimism which is founded on the fallacy of which I have spoken above. Before we congratulate ourselves upon the absence of certain faults from our nation or society, we ought to ask ourselves why it is that these faults are absent. Are we without the fault because we have the opposite virtue? Or are we without the fault because we have the opposite fault? It is a good thing assuredly, to be innocent of any excess; but let us be sure that we are not innocent of excess merely by being guilty of defect. Is it really true that our English political satire is so moderate because

it is so magnanimous, so forgiving, so saintly? Is it penetrated through and through with a mystical charity, with a psychological tenderness? Do we spare the feelings of the Cabinet Minister because we pierce through all his apparent crimes and follies down to the dark virtues of which his own soul is unaware? Do we temper the wind to the Leader of the Opposition because in our all-embracing heart we pity and cherish the struggling spirit of the Leader of the Opposition? Briefly, have we left off being brutal because we are too grand and generous to be brutal? Is it really true that we are *better* than brutality? Is it really true that we have *passed* the bludgeon stage?

I fear that there is, to say the least of it, another side to the matter. Is it not only too probable that the mildness of our political satire, when compared with the political satire of our fathers, arises simply from the profound unreality of our current politics? Rowlandson and Gilray did not fight merely because they were naturally pothouse pugilists; they fought because they had something to fight about. It is easy enough to be refined about things that do not matter; but men kicked and plunged a little in that portentous wrestle in which swung to and fro, alike dizzy with danger, the independence of England, the independence of Ireland, the independence of France. If we wish for a proof of this fact that the lack of refinement did not come from mere brutality, the proof is easy. The proof is that in that struggle no personalities were more brutal than the really refined personalities. None were more violent and intolerant than

those who were by nature polished and sensitive. Nelson, for instance, had the nerves and good manners of a woman: nobody in his senses, I suppose, would call Nelson "brutal." But when he was touched upon the national matter, there sprang out of him a spout of oaths, and he could only tell men to "Kill! kill, kill the d-d Frenchmen." It would be as easy to take examples on the other side. Camille Desmoulins was a man of much the same type, not only elegant and sweet in temper, but almost tremulously tender and humanitarian. But he was ready, he said, "to embrace Liberty upon a pile of corpses." In Ireland there were even more instances. Robert Emmet was only one famous example of a whole family of men at once sensitive and savage. I think that Mr. F.C. Gould is altogether wrong in talking of this political ferocity as if it were some sort of survival from ruder conditions, like a flint axe or a hairy man. Cruelty is, perhaps, the worst kind of sin. Intellectual cruelty is certainly the worst kind of cruelty. But there is nothing in the least barbaric or ignorant about intellectual cruelty. The great Renaissance artists who mixed colours exquisitely mixed poisons equally exquisitely; the great Renaissance princes who designed instruments of music also designed instruments of torture. Barbarity, malignity, the desire to hurt men, are the evil things generated in atmospheres of intense reality when great nations or great causes are at war. We may, perhaps, be glad that we have not got them: but it is somewhat dangerous to be proud that we have not got them. Perhaps we are hardly great enough to have them.

Perhaps some great virtues have to be generated, as in men like Nelson or Emmet, before we can have these vices at all, even as temptations. I, for one, believe that if our caricaturists do not hate their enemies, it is not because they are too big to hate them, but because their enemies are not big enough to hate. I do not think we have passed the bludgeon stage. I believe we have not come to the bludgeon stage. We must be better, braver, and purer men than we are before we come to the bludgeon stage.

Let us then, by all means, be proud of the virtues that we have not got; but let us not be too arrogant about the virtues that we cannot help having. It may be that a man living on a desert island has a right to congratulate himself upon the fact that he can meditate at his ease. But he must not congratulate himself on the fact that he is on a desert island, and at the same time congratulate himself on the self-restraint he shows in not going to a ball every night. Similarly our England may have a right to congratulate itself upon the fact that her politics are very quiet, amicable, and humdrum. But she must not congratulate herself upon that fact and also congratulate herself upon the self-restraint she shows in not tearing herself and her citizens into rags. Between two English Privy Councillors polite language is a mark of civilisation, but really not a mark of magnanimity.

Allied to this question is the kindred question on which we so often hear an innocent British boast – the fact that our statesmen are privately on very friendly relations, although in Parliament they sit on opposite sides of the House. Here, again, it is as well

to have no illusions. Our statesmen are not monsters of mystical generosity or insane logic, who are really able to hate a man from three to twelve and to love him from twelve to three. If our social relations are more peaceful than those of France or America or the England of a hundred years ago, it is simply because our politics are more peaceful; not improbably because our politics are more fictitious. If our statesmen agree more in private, it is for the very simple reason that they agree more in public. And the reason they agree so much in both cases is really that they belong to one social class; and therefore the dining life is the real life. Tory and Liberal statesmen like each other, but it is not because they are both expansive; it is because they are both exclusive.

PATRIOTISM AND SPORT

I notice that some papers, especially papers that call themselves patriotic, have fallen into quite a panic over the fact that we have been twice beaten in the world of sport, that a Frenchman has beaten us at golf, and that Belgians have beaten us at rowing. I suppose that the incidents are important to any people who ever believed in the self-satisfied English legend on this subject. I suppose that there are men who vaguely believe that we could never be beaten by a Frenchman, despite the fact that we have often been beaten by Frenchmen, and once by a Frenchwoman. In the old pictures in *Punch* you will find a recurring piece of satire. The English caricaturists always assumed that a Frenchman could not ride to hounds or enjoy English hunting. It did not seem to occur to them that all the people who founded English hunting were Frenchmen. All the Kings and nobles who originally rode to hounds spoke French. Large numbers of those Englishmen who still ride to hounds have French names. I suppose that the thing is important to any one who is ignorant of such evident matters as these. I suppose that if a man has ever believed that we English have some sacred and separate right to be athletic, such reverses do appear quite enormous and shocking. They feel as if, while the proper sun was rising in the east, some other and unexpected sun had begun to rise in the north-north-west by north. For the benefit, the moral

and intellectual benefit of such people, it may be worth while to point out that the Anglo-Saxon has in these cases been defeated precisely by those competitors whom he has always regarded as being out of the running; by Latins, and by Latins of the most easy and unstrenuous type; not only by Frenchman, but by Belgians. All this, I say, is worth telling to any intelligent person who believes in the haughty theory of Anglo-Saxon superiority. But, then, no intelligent person does believe in the haughty theory of Anglo-Saxon superiority. No quite genuine Englishman ever did believe in it. And the genuine Englishman these defeats will in no respect dismay.

The genuine English patriot will know that the strength of England has never depended upon any of these things; that the glory of England has never had anything to do with them, except in the opinion of a large section of the rich and a loose section of the poor which copies the idleness of the rich. These people will, of course, think too much of our failure, just as they thought too much of our success. The typical Jingo who has admired their countrymen too much for being conquerors will, doubtless, despise their countrymen too much for being conquered. But the Englishman with any feeling for England will know that athletic failures do not prove that England is weak, any more than athletic successes proved that England was strong. The truth is that athletics, like all other things, especially modern, are insanely individualistic. The Englishmen who win sporting prizes are exceptional among Englishmen, for the simple reason that

they are exceptional even among men. English athletes represent England just about as much as Mr. Barnum's freaks represent America. There are so few of such people in the whole world that it is almost a toss-up whether they are found in this or that country.

If any one wants a simple proof of this, it is easy to find. When the great English athletes are not exceptional Englishmen they are generally not Englishmen at all. Nay, they are often representatives of races of which the average tone is specially incompatible with athletics. For instance, the English are supposed to rule the natives of India in virtue of their superior hardiness, superior activity, superior health of body and mind. The Hindus are supposed to be our subjects because they are less fond of action, less fond of openness and the open air. In a word, less fond of cricket. And, substantially, this is probably true, that the Indians are less fond of cricket. All the same, if you ask among Englishmen for the very best cricket-player, you will find that he is an Indian. Or, to take another case: it is, broadly speaking, true that the Jews are, as a race, pacific, intellectual, indifferent to war, like the Indians, or, perhaps, contemptuous of war, like the Chinese: nevertheless, of the very good prize-fighters, one or two have been Jews.

This is one of the strongest instances of the particular kind of evil that arises from our English form of the worship of athletics. It concentrates too much upon the success of individuals. It began, quite naturally and rightly, with wanting England to win.

The second stage was that it wanted some Englishmen to win. The third stage was (in the ecstasy and agony of some special competition) that it wanted one particular Englishman to win. And the fourth stage was that when he had won, it discovered that he was not even an Englishman.

This is one of the points, I think, on which something might really be said for Lord Roberts and his rather vague ideas which vary between rifle clubs and conscription. Whatever may be the advantages or disadvantages otherwise of the idea, it is at least an idea of procuring equality and a sort of average in the athletic capacity of the people; it might conceivably act as a corrective to our mere tendency to see ourselves in certain exceptional athletes. As it is, there are millions of Englishmen who really think that they are a muscular race because C.B. Fry is an Englishman. And there are many of them who think vaguely that athletics must belong to England because Ranjitsinhji is an Indian.

But the real historic strength of England, physical and moral, has never had anything to do with this athletic specialism; it has been rather hindered by it. Somebody said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on Eton playing-fields. It was a particularly unfortunate remark, for the English contribution to the victory of Waterloo depended very much more than is common in victories upon the steadiness of the rank and file in an almost desperate situation. The Battle of Waterloo was won by the stubbornness of the common soldier – that is to say, it was won by the man

who had never been to Eton. It was absurd to say that Waterloo was won on Eton cricket-fields. But it might have been fairly said that Waterloo was won on the village green, where clumsy boys played a very clumsy cricket. In a word, it was the average of the nation that was strong, and athletic glories do not indicate much about the average of a nation. Waterloo was not won by good cricket-players. But Waterloo was won by bad cricket-players, by a mass of men who had some minimum of athletic instincts and habits.

It is a good sign in a nation when such things are done badly. It shows that all the people are doing them. And it is a bad sign in a nation when such things are done very well, for it shows that only a few experts and eccentrics are doing them, and that the nation is merely looking on. Suppose that whenever we heard of walking in England it always meant walking forty-five miles a day without fatigue. We should be perfectly certain that only a few men were walking at all, and that all the other British subjects were being wheeled about in Bath-chairs. But if when we hear of walking it means slow walking, painful walking, and frequent fatigue, then we know that the mass of the nation still is walking. We know that England is still literally on its feet.

The difficulty is therefore that the actual raising of the standard of athletics has probably been bad for national athleticism. Instead of the tournament being a healthy *mêlée* into which any ordinary man would rush and take his chance, it has become a fenced and guarded tilting-yard for the collision of

particular champions against whom no ordinary man would pit himself or even be permitted to pit himself. If Waterloo was won on Eton cricket-fields it was because Eton cricket was probably much more careless then than it is now. As long as the game was a game, everybody wanted to join in it. When it becomes an art, every one wants to look at it. When it was frivolous it may have won Waterloo: when it was serious and efficient it lost Magersfontein.

In the Waterloo period there was a general rough-and-tumble athleticism among average Englishmen. It cannot be re-created by cricket, or by conscription, or by any artificial means. It was a thing of the soul. It came out of laughter, religion, and the spirit of the place. But it was like the modern French duel in this – that it might happen to anybody. If I were a French journalist it might really happen that Monsieur Clemenceau might challenge me to meet him with pistols. But I do not think that it is at all likely that Mr. C. B. Fry will ever challenge me to meet him with cricket-bats.

AN ESSAY ON TWO CITIES

A little while ago I fell out of England into the town of Paris. If a man fell out of the moon into the town of Paris he would know that it was the capital of a great nation. If, however, he fell (perhaps off some other side of the moon) so as to hit the city of London, he would not know so well that it was the capital of a great nation; at any rate, he would not know that the nation was so great as it is. This would be so even on the assumption that the man from the moon could not read our alphabet, as presumably he could not, unless elementary education in that planet has gone to rather unsuspected lengths. But it is true that a great part of the distinctive quality which separates Paris from London may be even seen in the names. Real democrats always insist that England is an aristocratic country. Real aristocrats always insist (for some mysterious reason) that it is a democratic country. But if any one has any real doubt about the matter let him consider simply the names of the streets. Nearly all the streets out of the Strand, for instance, are named after the first name, second name, third name, fourth, fifth, and sixth names of some particular noble family; after their relations, connections, or places of residence – Arundel Street, Norfolk Street, Villiers Street, Bedford Street, Southampton Street, and any number of others. The names are varied, so as to introduce the same family under all sorts of different surnames. Thus we have Arundel

Street and also Norfolk Street; thus we have Buckingham Street and also Villiers Street. To say that this is not aristocracy is simply intellectual impudence. I am an ordinary citizen, and my name is Gilbert Keith Chesterton; and I confess that if I found three streets in a row in the Strand, the first called Gilbert Street, the second Keith Street, and the third Chesterton Street, I should consider that I had become a somewhat more important person in the commonwealth than was altogether good for its health. If Frenchmen ran London (which God forbid!), they would think it quite as ludicrous that those streets should be named after the Duke of Buckingham as that they should be named after me. They are streets out of one of the main thoroughfares of London. If French methods were adopted, one of them would be called Shakspeare Street, another Cromwell Street, another Wordsworth Street; there would be statues of each of these persons at the end of each of these streets, and any streets left over would be named after the date on which the Reform Bill was passed or the Penny Postage established.

Suppose a man tried to find people in London by the names of the places. It would make a fine farce, illustrating our illogicality. Our hero having once realised that Buckingham Street was named after the Buckingham family, would naturally walk into Buckingham Palace in search of the Duke of Buckingham. To his astonishment he would meet somebody quite different. His simple lunar logic would lead him to suppose that if he wanted the Duke of Marlborough (which seems unlikely) he would

find him at Marlborough House. He would find the Prince of Wales. When at last he understood that the Marlboroughs live at Blenheim, named after the great Marlborough's victory, he would, no doubt, go there. But he would again find himself in error if, acting upon this principle, he tried to find the Duke of Wellington, and told the cabman to drive to Waterloo. I wonder that no one has written a wild romance about the adventures of such an alien, seeking the great English aristocrats, and only guided by the names; looking for the Duke of Bedford in the town of that name, seeking for some trace of the Duke of Norfolk in Norfolk. He might sail for Wellington in New Zealand to find the ancient seat of the Wellingtons. The last scene might show him trying to learn Welsh in order to converse with the Prince of Wales.

But even if the imaginary traveller knew no alphabet of this earth at all, I think it would still be possible to suppose him seeing a difference between London and Paris, and, upon the whole, the real difference. He would not be able to read the words "Quai Voltaire;" but he would see the sneering statue and the hard, straight roads; without having heard of Voltaire he would understand that the city was Voltairean. He would not know that Fleet Street was named after the Fleet Prison. But the same national spirit which kept the Fleet Prison closed and narrow still keeps Fleet Street closed and narrow. Or, if you will, you may call Fleet Street cosy, and the Fleet Prison cosy. I think I could be more comfortable in the Fleet Prison, in an English way

of comfort, than just under the statue of Voltaire. I think that the man from the moon would know France without knowing French; I think that he would know England without having heard the word. For in the last resort all men talk by signs. To talk by statues is to talk by signs; to talk by cities is to talk by signs. Pillars, palaces, cathedrals, temples, pyramids, are an enormous dumb alphabet: as if some giant held up his fingers of stone. The most important things at the last are always said by signs, even if, like the Cross on St. Paul's, they are signs in heaven. If men do not understand signs, they will never understand words.

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 not to learn things; nay, 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 (which does not at present appear probable), 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. I do not care so much whether they can read the names over the shops. I do care very much whether they can

read the shops. I do not feel deeply troubled as to whether they can tell where London is on the map so long as they can tell where Brixton is on the way home. I do not even mind whether they can put two and two together in the mathematical sense; I am content if they can put two and two together in the metaphorical sense. But all this longer statement of an obvious view comes back to the metaphor I have employed. I do not care a dump whether they know the alphabet, so long as they know the dumb alphabet.

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