



The DEFENDANT

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'I have found that humanity is not incidentally engaged, but eternally and systematically engaged, in throwing gold into the gutter and diamonds into the sea. . . . ; therefore I have imagined that the main business of man, however humble, is defence. I have conceived that a defendant is chiefly required when worldlings despise the world – that a counsel for the defence would not have been out of place in the terrible day when the sun was darkened over Calvary and Man was rejected of men.'

G.K. Chesterton, 'Introduction', *The Defendant* (1901)

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The Child Who Was Chesterton

by Karl Schmude

The feast of Christmas has a natural connection with both Chesterton and children.

Chesterton wrote a substantial number of articles on Christmas. A small selection appeared in 1984 in the book, 'The Spirit of Christmas', edited by Marie Smith, and there is an illuminating lecture on the subject, by Dale Ahlquist, on the website of the American Chesterton Society (<https://www.chesterton.org/lecture-87/>).

Chesterton's appreciation of Christmas was linked to his love of children, and goes back to his earliest years.

He had himself benefitted from an idyllic childhood. In his *Autobiography* (1936), he reflects at length on his experiences as a child. The early chapters are, as the literary critic John Gross noted, 'littered with sound observations and shrewd distinctions which are still worth pondering, notably in connection with the nature of play and the difference between imagination and illusion.' (London Observer', 13 April 1969).

The autobiography explains how Chesterton's whole intellectual outlook was suffused with the sensibility of a child. What he had valued instinctively as a child – the experience of the concrete and the commonplace, and the personality of the small in comparison with the rootlessly large – he came to value intellectually as an adult.

It was in childhood that he had imbibed an appreciation of primary realities, which furnished a secure foundation for his later



Chesterton receives the gift of a dandelion

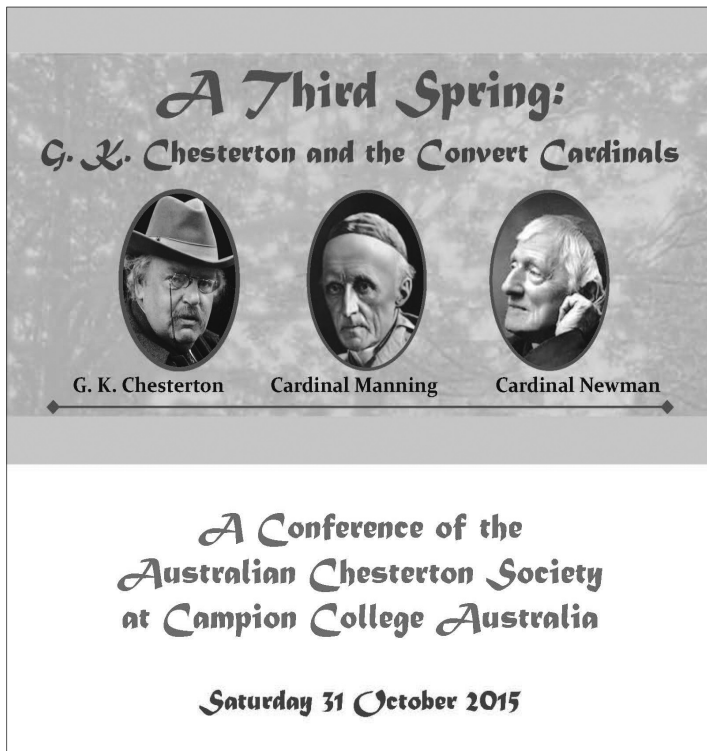
analysis of the social conditions most in harmony with human nature. As he wrote in his *Autobiography*:

'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.'

No doubt Chesterton's affinity with children was sharpened by the suffering he and his wife Frances bore in not being able to have their own family.

Stories abound of the enjoyment they derived from entertaining children, both at their home in Beaconsfield – where they staged annual Christmas Eve pantomimes – and while travelling.

Maisie Ward recalls that GK, while on a train for a speaking engagement in the city of Bradford, spent the journey playing with some children in the same compartment instead of preparing the lecture he had been intending to prepare. As the children alighted, their father thanked Chesterton, explaining that his wife had just died and he was still recovering from the shock.



Chesterton and the Cardinals

The tenth conference of the Australian Chesterton Society was held on Saturday, 31 October, at Campion College in Sydney.

The Society's first conference took place at New Norcia (WA) in 2000, at the time the Society itself became a national body. Since then there have been meetings held, annually or biennially, in various centres, but since 2007 at Campion College.

The theme of this year's meeting was 'A Third Spring,' and the various papers focused on Chesterton and the two famous 'convert Cardinals' of the 19th century, Newman and Manning. They explored the connections between these major Catholic figures, and highlighted the ways in which they gave new life to the intellectual and social traditions of the Church.

Paul Morrissey, President of Campion College, gave the opening paper on Chesterton himself, exploring his understanding of the human person, after which Garrick Small, Associate Professor in the School of Business and Law at Central Queensland University, spoke on Chesterton and Manning. He compared the respective contributions they made to the forging of a Catholic social tradition, bridging the 19th and 20th centuries.

A musical interlude took place after lunch, in which a group of Campion students and graduates, led by Robert van Gend, sang a number of items relating to Newman, in particular his well-known hymns, such as 'Lead, Kindly Light'.

The final two papers were delivered by Stephen McInerney, Senior Lecturer in Literature at Campion, speaking on Newman's Idea of a University and his serving as Rector of the Catholic University of Ireland, while Karl Schmude explored the similarities between Edmund Campion and Newman.

The papers are available in a simple printed format, at a price of \$12.00 (including postage), payable either by cheque to the Secretary/Treasurer, Mr Ray Finnegan, or by electronic transfer. Address and account details are available below. In addition, the papers were recorded and can be accessed on the website of Campion College Australia – www.campion.edu.au

Chesterton on Newman

'[Newman] was a man at once of abnormal energy and abnormal sensibility: nobody without that combination could have written the *Apologia*. If he sometimes seemed to skin his enemies alive, it was because he himself lacked a skin. In this sense his *Apologia* is a triumph far beyond the ephemeral charge on which it was founded; in this sense he does indeed (to use his own expression) vanquish not his accuser but his judges. . . .

'[H]is triumphs are the triumphs of a highly sensitive man: a man must feel insults before he can so insultingly and splendidly avenge them.'

G.K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1912)

Chesterton on Manning

'I remember once walking with my father along Kensington High Street, and seeing a crowd of people gathered by a rather dark and narrow entry on the southern side of that thoroughfare. I had seen crowds before; and was quite prepared for their shouting or shoving. But I was not prepared for what happened next. In a flash a sort of ripple ran along the line and all these eccentrics went down on their knees on the public pavement.

'I had never seen people play any such antics except in church; and I stopped and stared. Then I realised that a sort of little dark cab or carriage had drawn up opposite the entry; and out of it came a ghost clad in flames. . . .

'And then I looked at his face and was startled with a contrast; for his face was dead pale like ivory and very wrinkled and old, fitted together out of naked nerve and bone and sinew; with hollow eyes in shadow; but not ugly; having in every line the ruin of great beauty. The face was so extraordinary that for a moment I even forgot such perfectly scrumptious scarlet clothes.

'We passed on; and then my father said, "Do you know who that was? That was Cardinal Manning.'

G.K. Chesterton, *Autobiography* (1936)

Introducing Children to Chesterton

Chesterton wrote for adults and little of his prolific output would qualify as 'children's literature,' but his deep understanding of childhood, as well as his general worldview, offer an irresistible appeal to the young.

The American author, Nancy Carpentier Brown, has long reflected on ways of introducing Chesterton to children. She has produced adaptations of Chesterton stories for children (The Father Brown Reader and The Father Brown Reader II) as well as study guides for high school students of a number of Chesterton's works. Her newest book is *The Woman Who Was Chesterton*, a biography of Chesterton's wife, Frances.

The article below originally appeared in 'The Catholic Home Educator' and was subsequently republished online (<http://www.homeschoolstories.com/academics/literature/>). It is reprinted in a somewhat edited form with the kind permission of Nancy Carpentier Brown.



Nancy Carpentier Brown

'Daybreak is a never-ending glory; getting out of bed is a never-ending nuisance.'

So said the great English writer, G.K. Chesterton. As soon as I read this, I knew I liked Chesterton, and after reading some of his work, I wished I could be his friend.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton loved children, and the feeling was mutual. Chesterton retained a child-like quality all his life. He was interested in all subjects, saw each day as a new miracle, and kept a sense of wonder and awe for the world and its Creator.

Children have the same sense of awe and wonder, because for them, the whole world is new. When a child sees his first butterfly, he is amazed. Chesterton identified with a child's ability to look at life as ever new, he loved stories about triumph, valor, glorious battles where the victors were always on the side of right and good. He was witty and quickly gained the confidence of his young friends. He played with them, he listened to them, and he loved them.

So, what can you do if you'd like to introduce your younger children to Chesterton?

I found that although Chesterton played with children, wrote stories, plays, poems and songs, and even put on puppet plays for children, most of his writing for children was private correspondence, remaining unpublished to this day. So what can we do?

I would suggest a few possibilities. First of all, we should be reading G.K. Chesterton ourselves, as home schooling parents. Chesterton's defence of home, motherhood, education in the home and the value of children should be required reading for us. For helpful suggestions on a reading plan, see the American Chesterton Society's web site, or request their catalogue. The aim of the American Chesterton Society is to promote and encourage a revival of Chesterton's work in the home, the school, and the university. The Chesterton Society has a tremendously helpful website, with many interesting articles.

Next, begin to talk about Chesterton at home with your children. Tell them about the Chesterton book you are currently reading, and why you find it enjoyable. Read them quotes you find amusing, and see if they understand the joke.

If your children have entered the age where they like mysteries, tell them about Chesterton's Father Brown mysteries. For a child's introduction to Father Brown, I would suggest the audiotope, by Jim Weiss, called *Mystery! Mystery!* There are three mystery stories on the tape, one of which

Society Membership

The annual membership fee of the Australian Chesterton Society is \$25.00.

Subscriptions may be sent to the Secretary/Treasurer, Mr Ray Finnegan, at the address above, or by electronic transfer –

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is *The Blue Cross*, by Chesterton. It is done very well. (See below.)

A movie was made long ago of the same story about the valuable cross. The movie was called *The Detective* and is in glorious black and white. There is no violence, no morally objectionable scenes, and the bad guy ends up converting in the end! In the movie, Alec Guinness plays Father Brown. Many of you will have heard the now-famous story about Mr. Guinness' conversion, due to his wearing the priestly costume when this story was filmed. My 6 and 10 year olds enjoyed this movie with me.

The novels of Chesterton are, in my opinion, for the older teen and adults only. They are difficult to understand and need a more mature mind to appreciate the depth and mystery of the stories. However, I have introduced my children to *The Man Who Was Thursday*, by telling them about the funny names, and briefly outlining the story for them.

The essays of G.K. Chesterton are also for the older teen. His conversion to the Catholic Church and other Catholic defense essays, such as "Why I am a Catholic," "The Well and the Shallows," etc., are excellent reading materials for the olderteen/adult. For the younger child, you may just want to tell them that Chesterton became a Catholic when he was 48.

If your child is in that phase where he is enamored with the idea of having a club or group of some sort, it is the perfect time to tell him about Chesterton's Junior Debating Club. Chesterton and about ten other friends formed the club to

exercise their minds and try out new ideas. Their club branched out and they eventually had a library, a naturalists' club, a chess club and a magazine to publish their own works. Children can relate to the desire to form a group and perhaps they will be inspired to form their own Junior Debating Club.

Children are also interested to know that Chesterton loved St. Francis of Assisi, and chose him as his Confirmation patron saint. Chesterton's love of St. Francis began when he was very young, and his parents read him a book about the life of St. Francis. The love he had for the saint was life-long. It is encouraging as a parent, too, to hear a story like this. We never know what book we've read to our children that may have a long-lasting effect on their life. But we should keep in mind that it should be a good book that we do read to them!

So even though G. K. Chesterton doesn't have books specifically written for children, I would strongly recommend introducing your children to him now, while they are young. As they grow, add more of his work. If they do come to know and love Chesterton when they are young, they will certainly want to read his books as they mature.

Reading Chesterton and his clear thinking, his love of truth and the Catholic faith is encouraging to adults as well as to older teens. Many people have never read Chesterton and to them, may I say, it's time to begin!

Chesterton's writing is funny, encouraging, and truthful. You will find yourself saying, "Yes! That's exactly what I was thinking!" ■

The Fascinating Differences of Children

A famous piece of Chesterton's on children appeared in his first book of essays, The Defendant (1901), which republished pieces he contributed to the Daily News, the first newspaper for which he wrote. The essay was called 'A Defence of Baby-Worship,' excerpts from which are reproduced below:

The most unfathomable schools and sages have never attained to the gravity which dwells in the eyes of a baby of three months old. It is the gravity of astonishment at the universe, and astonishment at the universe is not mysticism, but a transcendent common sense.

The fascination of children lies in this: that with each of them all things are remade, and the universe is put again upon its trial. As we walk the streets and see below us those delightful bulbous heads . . . , we ought always primarily to remember that within every one of these heads there is a new universe, as new as it was on the seventh day of creation. In each of those orbs there is a new system of stars, new grass, new cities, a new sea. . .

Maturity, with its endless energies and aspirations, may easily be convinced that it will find new things to appreciate; but

it will never be convinced, at bottom, that it has properly appreciated what it has got. . . . But the influence of children goes further than its first trifling effort of remaking heaven and earth. It forces us actually to remodel our conduct in accordance with this revolutionary theory of the marvelousness of all things. We do (even when we are perfectly simply or ignorant) – we do actually treat talking in children as marvellous, walking in children as marvellous, common intelligence in children as marvellous. . .

The truth is that it is our attitude towards children that is right, and our attitude towards grown-up people that is wrong. Our attitude towards our equals in age consists in a servile solemnity, overlying a considerable degree of indifference or disdain. Our attitude towards children consists in a condescending indulgence, overlying an unfathomable respect. . . . We make puppets of children, lecture them, pull their hair, and reverence, love, and fear them. When we reverence anything in the mature, it is their virtues or their wisdom, and this is an easy matter. But we reverence the faults and follies of children.

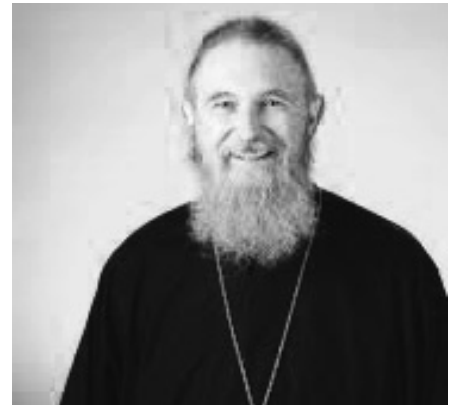
We should probably come considerably nearer to the true conception of things if we treated all grown-up persons, of all titles and types, with precisely that dark affection and dazed respect with which we treat the infantile limitations.

The Elves Have Left the Building

The central importance of wonder as the inspiration of learning has often been highlighted. At an early stage in his writing career, Chesterton said:

'Of one thing I am certain, that the age needs, first and foremost, to be startled; to be taught the nature of wonder.' (1903) Reprinted in *The Man Who Was Orthodox* (1963).

Recently **Fr Stephen Freeman** offered the following reflection on the enduring importance and value of wonder in today's world, in a way reminiscent of Chesterton. A priest of the Orthodox Church in America, Fr Stephen serves as Rector of St Anne Orthodox Church in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and his article is reprinted with his kind permission.



Fr Stephen Freeman

Children, at their best, have an amazing ability to wonder. The world is fresh and new for them, with many things being seen and encountered for the very first time.

They sometimes come to wrong conclusions, but even their wrong conclusions can be revealing to adults. Adults often fall into habit when it comes to experiencing the world. We drive to and from work by the same routes and routinize our lives repeatedly. These "ruts" make us blind to much that surrounds us and deadens our senses as well as our own capacity for wonder. At its worst, we become nearly immune to awe. We worry that we will be fooled.

I have made a link between "faerie" and the Kingdom of God in recent articles. What do I mean by "faerie" and what does it have to do with God's Kingdom? How is it that children are closer to the Kingdom than adults (Mark 10:15)?

Story suggesting the unseen world

'Faerie' (note: this is not the same as 'fairy') refers to a form of story, even a range of mythology, that suggests that there is a hidden, unseen world beside and just beneath our own. Sometimes the stories associated with it are quite ancient. They often have a strong element of folklore about them. They carry a teasing sense of truth, though with enough plausible denial to leave room for doubt.

Faerie plays a large role in all traditional cultures (only modernity banishes faerie from the world). Traditional European cultures are replete with stories of the 'little people', whether they are called 'fairies', 'leprechauns', 'elves', 'gnomes', or what-have-you. Of course, these are not all the same. They occasionally have some overlapping with the Christian story, though they clearly predate the advent of Christianity.

Some Christians dismiss them as demons, while others take a modern route and simply dismiss them altogether.

The modern world is the most literal of all times. Theories of objectivity have so focused the attention of the average person that the unusual and the strange are largely banished from our observations. Of course, within the myth of modernity,

many rush to extra-terrestrials and conspiracy theories to fill in the gap.

Modern dismissals make much of the term 'superstition', but even this word is quite revealing. At its root, 'superstition' means to 'stand over'. This either refers to 'standing over something in awe', or to something that is itself 'standing over or beside us'. It is, in essence, the assertion that there is more to the world than meets the eye.

This is where the connection comes with the Kingdom of God. Christ's teaching on the Kingdom says not that there is more to the world than meets the eye, but that the eye of the heart has become blind to the truth of the world's existence. In the darkness of the heart, the world would appear to be nothing more than raw competition for consumption and survival.

Christ points to mercy and forgiveness and a generosity of life that understands self-sacrifice and self-emptying to be the true path to fullness of being. Such assertions can only be true if the world is other than we see it. Christ does not teach that we should lay our lives down for others because it is 'nice' to do so. He teaches that this behaviour is actually consistent with things as they truly are. That we do not see this as obvious is due to our blindness – not to the nature of the world itself.

The truth of the world is summed up in the term 'Kingdom of God'. What is coming into the world is not something new, but a revealing of things as they truly are. What is now largely hidden is being made known. The greatest revelation of this reality is Christ's own resurrection from the dead.

What we have in *faerie* is not the same thing as the Kingdom of God at all; but it has a kinship. Children have a natural affinity with faerie in the innocence of their hearts.

That innocence often perceives the world without judging and scrutinizing it. Children allow the world to be wonderful and beyond their comprehension.

We all do well to become children at heart and live in wonder – lest we drive both the elves and God Himself out of our lives.

Chesterton and Anti-Semitism

Was Chesterton anti-Semitic? This has been an allegation commonly raised against Chesterton over the years. In a recent book, the British author, Ann Farmer, investigated the issue closely, and Dale Ahlquist's review of her book is here reprinted, with his kind permission, from the American Chesterton Society's Gilbert magazine (July/August 2015).

Chesterton and the Jews – Friend, Critic, Defender
by Ann Farmer (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Angelico Press, 2015)
530 pages, US\$21.95 (paperback)

The name Israel means 'The one who wrestles with God'. It was given to Jacob, the Number Three Hebrew Patriarch, after an all-night bout with the angel of the Lord. And the people of Israel have indeed been wrestling with God ever since.

They have also been wrestling with everybody else. Being the Chosen People may have certain advantages, but it is also a tremendous burden, whether in carrying a sacred ark across a desert or maintaining an exclusive place of worship or dealing with a carpenter who claims to be divine or being scattered across the world as a nation without a country or, most recently, becoming a country without a world.

G.K. Chesterton says, 'The world owes God to the Jews.' Higher praise would be hard to come by. He calls them a 'noble and historic' people, but he, too, is aware of their ongoing wrestling match with God and neighbor. He says, 'Jews are a race in a unique and unnatural difficulty, cutting them off from the creative functions of a soil and the fighting responsibilities of a flag.' Their social and political dilemmas are not their fault, but their own plight has caused problems for Christians, whose traditions are entangled with theirs.

Chesterton sincerely tries to disentangle all of it, and if nothing else, understand it. Solving riddles is his work as well as his play. Consistently attacking racial theories, dismantling determinist philosophies and doubting conspiracy theories, Chesterton lays out a philosophy in his



Dale Ahlquist

writing that represents complete thinking. And we see all of him in it. There is no secret Chesterton. He is truly an open book. He has explained himself better than anyone else has ever explained him. He has done it by being immensely prolific and profound, immensely quotable and open-hearted.

Joy and love of truth

What is most evident in his voluminous writings is his joy and his love of truth. He is a good man, and people have been drawn to that goodness. Yet there are people who find his truth-telling irritating. Unable to attack his truth, they attack his goodness in order to discredit his truth. The reasoning is that truth spoken by a hypocrite may be disregarded. Unfortunately for Chesterton's critics, the facts of his life have not fit their theories. It keeps turning out that he really is good, perhaps even heroically good.

However, just in case a Chesterton revival should kick in and he show up again and get noticed, his critics always keep ready a reliable handful of mud that can be flung at him to make him go away again. This Chesterton, they say, was, as everyone knows, an anti-Semite. A rabid anti-Semite. Therefore, not only can he not be a saint, he cannot even be taken seriously. Case closed again. Crisis averted. It was right to have ignored him.

But those of us who love Chesterton are distressed by that ugly accusation. And, though it seems to come as a shock, those of us who love Chesterton do not hate the Jews. And what is even more shocking, Chesterton does not hate the Jews, either.

Ann Farmer has devoted an entire book to the subject. The result of years of research, it is longer than most biographies of Chesterton. She has made a thorough and nearly exhaustive case defending him against the charge that has continually and recklessly been brought against him.

So let it be proclaimed still again: G.K. Chesterton is not an anti-Semite. And since that term is a slippery one, let us be even more specific: He does not hate the Jews. He is not their enemy. His ideas did not contribute to that tragedy that is the flashpoint of the twentieth century: Hitler's systematic attempt to annihilate the Jewish people in the Holocaust.

Though Chesterton never lived to see it happen, he warned the world that it could happen. And he had hoped to prevent it. In criticizing the critics, one has to walk a tightrope, because in defending someone against the charge of anti-Semitism one can in the process get the label stuck to oneself.

Misrepresented and misconstrued

Ann Farmer keeps her balance. She is careful and calm, scholarly and objective in presenting a massive amount of material with almost three thousand footnotes. She not only

allows Chesterton to explain and defend himself, but she gives his accusers plenty of time at the podium.

In citing both the periodicals of his own time and the scholarly studies on anti-Semitism since, she reveals one very troubling trend: Chesterton is constantly misrepresented and misconstrued, his comments torn out of context, his arguments disparaged and dismissed.

The literature repeats the anti-Semite epithet relentlessly and reflexively, and — especially in the case of London's *Jewish Chronicle* — with the worst adjectives and under inflammatory headlines. It is not surprising that Chesterton writes as much as he does about the subject: he is responding to what has been written about him. He shows much more graciousness and patience than is shown to him. For the most part he jokes about the 'legend' of his anti-Semitism, but his wife Frances confided in a diary that he was 'not a little hurt' by the accusation.

Jews have every right to be on guard against hatred and hostility toward themselves. However, because of an often hair-trigger sensitivity on the subject, most Gentiles are very hesitant ever to venture any criticism at all of the Jews. Chesterton is not. It is a matter of impartiality; he distributes his criticism to everyone and without malice. With America, he denounces Rockefeller and Carnegie and Ford on philosophical grounds, along with American 'hustle' and commercialism. Yet he praises the democratic experiment, the pioneer spirit, and 'the typical American' as opposed to 'the ideal American'.

With the Jews, he praises their loyalty to their families and to each other, their stubborn refusal to let their own identity disappear, their great intelligence and creativity. But he explains his concerns about the 'cosmopolitan' Jew, and the 'secular' Jew, and the 'financial' Jew. The first is not restrained by a patriotism to the country in which he lives, the second is not restrained by his religion, and the third is not restrained by anything. None of the three represents the whole of the Jewish people or even the majority, but they represent a problem for the Jews.

To deny the problem does not solve it. It is true that Chesterton's harping on international finance being controlled by Jews can be compared with Hitler's harping on the same subject. But looking in a rearview mirror one tends to see things backwards. Chesterton may have blamed international banking on a few rich Jewish families, but Hitler blamed everything on all the Jews.

Early critic of Hitler

And the proposed solutions are quite different. Chesterton only wanted to destroy the banks. Hitler wanted to destroy the Jews. Especially forgotten is that Chesterton is one of the earliest critics of Hitler when the rest of Europe, especially England, is still asleep.

While attempting to present a balanced portrait, Farmer concedes, sometimes too easily, that Chesterton makes some

unfavorable observations of the Jews, and she does not always expand more fully on his favorable comments. She generally reports the hostile criticisms of Chesterton without any filter, but at a couple of points she quietly observes that his critics come off as not only paranoid but savage. The evidence shows that they have failed utterly to understand Chesterton, and they have wrongly portrayed him as an enemy.

She argues persuasively that Chesterton's main motive is the safety of the Jews because he sees that their position in Europe is insecure. It explains why he was enlisted by Jewish Zionists at a time when many Jews themselves were not Zionists.

She also explains how Chesterton was drawn into a complicated controversy that he might have been able to approach differently had not his brother Cecil been sued for libel by Godfrey Isaacs, a Jewish businessman who had been implicated in the Marconi Scandal, a case of insider trading that involved British cabinet members, one of whom was Godfrey's brother Rufus. Ironically, Chesterton's loyalty to his own brother made him understand the loyalty of the Isaacs brothers.

Shaw, Wells and the Chesterbelloc

A significant section of the book is given to exploring the ideas of George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, both of whom had much more distasteful theories about the Jews than Chesterton. They wanted the Jews to assimilate and thereby disappear, and they did not rule out heavy-handed, tyrannical measures to see their goals achieved. But their reputations have never suffered among the Jews the way Chesterton's has. The reader is left to infer the reason: Chesterton is a Christian, the other two are not.

And then there is that old and unpermitted objection that some of his best friends are Jewish. But this argument cannot be so easily sneered at. There is not a believable explanation why the Jew-hating Chesterton has lifelong Jewish friends who adored him. There are even cases of Jews who do not want to meet him because of his reputation, but who become his friends and admirers after getting to know him and end up puzzled by what all the fuss was about.

In sum total, the book is a powerful defense of Chesterton, and the conclusion is especially provocative.

Farmer shows that Chesterton's prophetic insights about the Jews have been unjustly ignored. Moreover, those who have criticized him for even saying there was a 'Jewish Problem' have become the very people who are now saying there is an 'Israel Problem', but who, of course, are frightfully quick to deny that they are anti-Semitic.

This long libel against Chesterton must finally come to an end, and I hope that this fine book will help bring that about. His ideas about the Jews may not be convincing to everyone, but at least let it be admitted that he has loved and has not hated the Children of Israel. ■

Death of a Chesterton Anthologist

In August the British author, P J Kavanagh, died at the age of 84.

Primarily a poet, he was also renowned for his novels and journalism, serving at different times as a columnist for the *Spectator* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, and his talents extended to broadcasting and acting, particularly on TV.

For devotees of Chesterton, Kavanagh gained appreciation for the large anthology he compiled in 1985. Called *The Bodley Head G.K. Chesterton*, the work was a judicious blend of short and substantial extracts, including significant parts of several Chesterton books (such as *Orthodoxy* and *St Thomas Aquinas*) and *The Man Who Was Thursday* in its entirety.

In a lengthy and perceptive introduction to the anthology, Kavanagh remarked upon Chesterton's isolation from the general intellectual drift of his generation – 'which is something more powerful and significant than fashion, though of course it can be wrong.'

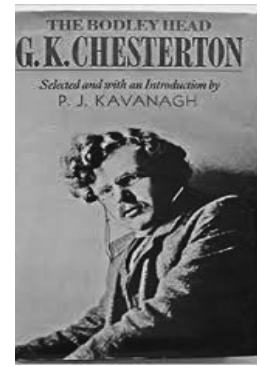
But Kavanagh emphasized, equally, how genial and unjaundiced Chesterton remained throughout these long years of 'standing apart from his time, both from received opinion and from progressive ideas, . . . [and] being the odd man out among his peers.' His intellectual loneliness 'never made him sound strident or angry.' He remained popular and widely read to an extraordinary degree.

Analogies and illustration by parallel

Kavanagh also commented on the accusation frequently leveled against Chesterton 'of being willfully paradoxical, of standing ideas on their heads for fun.'

'In fact, he rarely does so. His gift is for brilliant analogies, often absurd ones. Belloc called it "[Chesterton's] genius for illustration by parallel . . . I can speak here with experience, for in these conversations with him or listening to his conversation with others I was always astonished at an ability in illustration which I not only have never seen equaled but cannot remember to have seen attempted. He never sought such things; they poured from him as easily as though they were not the hard forged products of intense vision, but spontaneous remarks." (Quoted by Kavanagh from: Maisie Ward, *Gilbert Keith Chesterton*. 1944, p.)

A further quality of Chesterton's that Kavanagh highlights - again quoting Belloc - was his ability to *teach*, a word which Belloc italicizes. Kavanagh comments;



P J Kavanagh and his work, *The Bodley Head G.K. Chesterton*

'... Chesterton certainly was a teacher, wanting to help us see, with our eyes as well as, figuratively, with our minds.

'For so speculative a man he is surprisingly visual. One remembers that he began as an art student, and drew all his life (frequently demons: behind his geniality, or rather at the root of it and of all his work, is a lively sense of the power of evil). But, although his mind was illustrative, he was myopic, and this may have affected his method; he preferred the broad sweep, both pictorially and intellectually, to the focused detail.

'Not that this led to any vagueness or evasiveness in argument, or blurring of outline; on the contrary, it added vigour to the forward march of his prose, as though it refused to be distracted by brief roadside glimpses.

'Nevertheless, though he seldom numbers the petals on a rose, his description of landscape (and townscape) and climatic *effects* in the Father Brown stories, for example, are often the best things in them; and they came from a man who was not only short-sighted but who could seldom bring himself even to go for a walk.' ■


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