



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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Christmas Must Go

by G.K. Chesterton

Chesterton wrote articles every year on the theme of Christmas, often for more than one journal or newspaper. This article - somewhat shortened for space reasons - appeared in December 1934 in an Australian journal, The Catholic Fireside, published in the 1930s by the Sydney Catholic Club; though it was originally printed in G.K.'s Weekly in December 1933. It highlights Chesterton's ironic touch in mocking the pretensions of modernity and calling for a deeper understanding of Christmas.

Christmas is utterly unsuited to the modern world. It presupposes the possibility of families being united, or reunited, and even of the men and women who chose each other being on speaking terms.

Thus thousands of young adventurous spirits, ready to face the facts of human life, and encounter the vast variety of men and women as they really are, are cruelly forced to face an hour, nay sometimes even two

hours, in the society of Uncle George; or some aunt from Cheltenham whom they do not particularly like.

Such abominable tortures cannot be tolerated in a time like ours. . .

Christmas is unsuited to modern life; its concentration in the household was conceived without allowing for the size and convenience of the modern hotel; its

Australian Chesterton Conference - 2016

The most recent conference of the Australian Chesterton Society took place at Campion College on **Saturday, October 29**.

The theme was 'A World of Wonder', focusing on Chesterton's literary imagination. The conference featured papers on the Father Brown stories as well as comparisons of Chesterton as a literary artist with Dostoevsky, Flannery O'Connor, and Georges Bernanos.

The well-known journalist, Greg Sheridan, Foreign Editor of 'The Australian', spoke on 'Chesterton: the Journalist as an Artist'.

A special highlight was a paper by Iain Benson, Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame Australia, on his extraordinary personal collection of Chesterton books and archival material.

The conference papers were videotaped and will be available on the Society's website, www.chestertonaustralia.com. A printed set is also available for \$18.00 (incl. postage) on request to Karl Schmude (177 Erskine Street, Armidale NSW 2350).



Greg Sheridan and Karl Schmude at the recent Chesterton Conference

inheritance of ceremonial ignored the present convention of unconventionality. . . .

That freer and franker school of manners, which consists of being bored with everybody who is present and forgetting everybody who is absent, is insulted in its first part by the old custom of drinking healths or exchanging good wishes, and in its second part by the custom of writing letters or sending Christmas cards.

Under the load of such old tribal or communal exchanges, it is impossible to preserve the fine shade, the delicate distinction that marks modern manners; the distinction by which the next-door neighbour in the street is forgotten, while the next door neighbour at the dinner-table is only ignored. . . .

Christmas must go. Christmas is utterly unsuited to the great future that is now opening before us. Christmas is not founded on the great communal conception which can only find its final expression in Communism. Christmas does not really help the higher and healthier and more vigorous expansion of Capitalism.

Christmas cannot be expected to fit in with modern hopes of a great social future. Christmas is a contradiction of modern thought. Christmas is an obstacle to modern progress. Rooted in the past, and even the remote past, it cannot assist a world in which the ignorance of history is the only clear evidence of the knowledge of science. Born among miracles reported from two thousand years ago, it cannot expect to impress that sturdy common sense which can withstand the plainest and most palpable evidence for miracles happening at this moment. Dealing with matters purely psychic, it naturally has no interest for psychologists; having been the moral atmosphere of millions for more than sixteen centuries, it is of no interest to an age concerned with averages and

statistics. It is concerned with the happiest of births and is the chief enemy of Eugenics; it carries along with it a tradition of voluntary virginity, yet it contains no really practical hints for compulsory sterilization. At every point it is found to be in opposition to that great onward movement, by which we know that ethics will evolve into something that is more ethical and free from all ethical distinctions.

Christmas is not modern; Christmas is not Marxian; Christmas is not made on the pattern of that great age of the Machine, which promises to the masses an epoch of even greater happiness and prosperity than that to which it has brought the masses at this moment.

Christmas is medieval; having arisen in the earlier days of the Roman Empire. Christmas is a superstition. Christmas is a survival of the past.

But why go on piling up the praises of Christmas? All its gifts and glories are externally symbolized in that fact already sufficiently summarised; that it is a nuisance to all the people talking the particular nonsense of our own time. It is an irritation to all men who have lost their instincts; which is very truly the intellectual equivalent of losing their senses. . . .

It is a challenge to caddishness, because it reminds us of a more gracious world of courtesy; and of customs which assumed a sort of dignity in human relations. It is a puzzle to pedants whose cold hatred involves them in a continual contradiction; . . . trying to prove at the same time that it is entirely heathen, and was once as admirable as everything else invented by the pirates of heathen Scandinavia.

It stands up unbroken and baffling; for us one thing, for them a confusion of inconsistencies; and it judges the modern world. Christmas must go. It is going. In fact it is going strong. ■

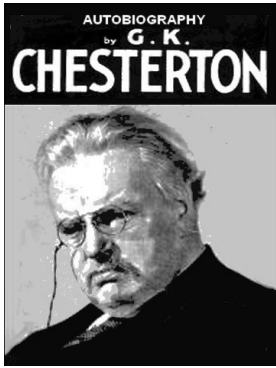
Chesterton on Christmas

'Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox; that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home.' (Quoted in *Brave New Family: G.K. Chesterton on Men and Women, Children, Sex, Divorce, Marriage and the Family*, 1990)

'The great majority of people will go on observing forms that cannot be explained; they will keep Christmas Day with Christmas gifts and Christmas benedictions; they will continue to do it; and some day suddenly wake up and discover why.' ('On Christmas,' in *Generally Speaking*, 1928)

'The more we are proud that the Bethlehem story is plain enough to be understood by the shepherds, and almost by the sheep, the more do we let ourselves go, in dark and gorgeous imaginative frescoes or pageants about the mystery and majesty of the Three Magian Kings.' (*Christendom in Dublin*, Ch. 3, 1932)





An Autobiography Revisited

by Garry Nieuwkamp

2016 marks the eightieth anniversary of the publication of Chesterton's autobiography, which was published posthumously. **Garry Nieuwkamp**, a doctor on the NSW Central Coast and long-time member of the Australian Chesterton Society, has given readers of *The Defendant* many thoughtful reviews of biographies of Chesterton. Here he offers his reflections on Chesterton's own biography.

The eightieth anniversary of Chesterton's autobiography provides us with an opportunity to reflect on, and to re-examine, the contribution this book has made to Chesterton scholarship.

It's an odd sort of a book. It calls to mind Chesterton's comments on being asked to write a book about Browning: 'I will not say that I wrote a book about Browning; but I wrote a book on love, liberty, poetry, my own views on God and religion (highly undeveloped), and various theories of my own about optimism and pessimism and the hope of the world.' The same could be said of his autobiography.

In fact, we are warned, not to expect a chronology of life events, so much as an interpretation of life events. This is what makes Chesterton's autobiography relevant to us today.

We are told early on in the autobiography that if we want to understand the author we need to understand his attitude to his childhood as 'the nursery note is necessary if all the rest is to be anything but nonsense.' In a wonderful passage of self-revelation, Chesterton writes:

I may say I have seen something of the world; I have travelled in interesting places and talked to interesting men; I have been in political quarrels often turning into faction fights; I have talked to statesmen in the hour of destiny of states; I have met most of the great poets and prose writers of my time; I have travelled in the track of some of the whirlwinds and earthquakes in the ends of the earth; I have lived in houses burned down in the tragic wars of Ireland; I have walked through the ruins of Polish palaces left behind by the Red armies; I have heard talk of the secret signals of the Ku Klux Klan upon the borders of Texas; I have seen the fanatical Arabs come up from the desert to attacks the Jews in Jerusalem.... but they will be unmeaning, if nobody understands that they still mean less to me than Punch and Judy on Camden Hill.

Chesterton believes in prolonging childhood, which is not to say that he wants to be a child but wants to move 'in broader daylight.'

With this attitude to life in mind, his wonderful life unfolds in a series of events.

We spend a chapter in his teenage years learning 'How to be a Dunce.' We revisit the Junior Debating Club where Chesterton formed lifelong friendships. He dispels the criticism that he was an anti-Semite, and for those interested in evidence of Chesterton's path to Rome, even before Chesterton's own insight, might find it interesting his being awarded the Milton prize for poetry, for a poem on the life of St. Francis Xavier.

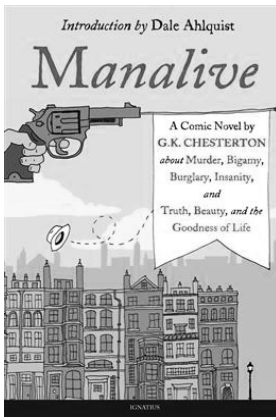
In a chapter titled, 'How to be a lunatic,' Chesterton reveals his astonishment at his own existence after a period of dabbling in spiritualism and a 'diseased state of brooding and idling.' He finds his feet with gainful employment, while at the same time, walking away from the abyss of nihilism.

In subsequent decades, Chesterton's reputation increases as more and more of his writing reaches the public. He gives an account of this part of his life through outlining those friendships and life events that have informed his beliefs.

The final few chapters read like a Who's Who of England. Politicians, poets, writers and literary celebrities fill the pages with amusing anecdotes. We read of Belloc and Henry James. We read of Yeats and George Bernard Shaw. We read of figures in Fleet Street, and insider trading in the Marconi affair. But we don't read about Chesterton's wife Francis. Her absence from the book, except oddly tangentially, seems remiss. One can only assume that Chesterton was protecting his wife's privacy.

The Ignatius edition with an introduction written by Randall Paine, published in 2006, seems to make up for this absence by a plethora of photographs. We are thus reminded that Francis shared in this remarkable life.

Chesterton's autobiography is well worth the investment of time. But I'm sure that if Chesterton were to comment on his own biography, he'd say that he never wrote a book about Chesterton, but 'a book on love, liberty, poetry, [and his] own views on God and religion.' ■



Dealing Life: A Review of *Manalive*

by Paul Joseph Prezvia

Chesterton's Manalive (1912) is commonly regarded as the most autobiographical of his novels, and it was the subject of a thoughtful review by Paul Joseph Prezvia in the October 10, 2016 issue of the online Catholic magazine, Crisis. Mr Prezvia has an MA in History from the University of Notre Dame (USA) and lives in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

This is an edited version of his article, reprinted with the kind permission of Crisis, whose web address is <http://www.crisismagazine.com/>, by which readers can subscribe for free.

Manalive is one of G.K. Chesterton's most joyful novels and a battle-cry against a deadly sin – that of acedia, or 'sloth,' as it is most commonly known.

While the Fathers of the Church – from the first desert hermits to St. Thomas Aquinas – have always understood and taught that acedia could manifest itself in many more subtle ways than mere 'laziness,' the nefarious nature of this sin has been less appreciated by most spiritual writers since the Middle Ages. Recently, however, prescient writers have begun to look more closely at acedia again; among them the Abbot of Wandrille, France, Fr. Jean-Charles Nault, who highlights, in a useful work on the spiritual life, the thought of St Thomas in this area.

St. Thomas gives two definitions of acedia: 'Sadness about spiritual good' and 'Disgust with activity.' Spiritual good and joyful activity happen to be the most important themes of *Manalive*.

The opening scene is at Beacon House, a boarding establishment in north London. We are introduced to 'five inmates standing disconsolately'; sad about the good and disgusted with activity. The men in the party ask themselves horrible questions such as 'Have you any friends?'

Into this stalemate of human relationships erupts a giant man with a small head who chases hats for sport, who selects wines based on bottle-colour alone, and who picnics on roofs. The small-headed man extends his stay and draws the inmates into his world of constant activity. Yet, this world is not marked by the constant activity of modernity, that of filing reports, or interminable meetings, the world of dreary work for dreary purposes. Rather, it is marked by the activity of play, play that is continually occupied with the wonderful, strange things of life such as the moral use of double exposure on film or the aesthetic combination of chalk and gowns.

The most significant of these games is the founding of the High Court of Beacon, a joke from which follows 'the string of solid and startling events – which were to include a hansom cab, a detective, a pistol, and a marriage licence' which carry the book to its end.

As play seeps into the souls of the men and women of Beacon

House, disgust diminishes and joy increases. 'All that glitters is gold' proclaims the madcap giant.

Far from being his or Chesterton's endorsement of superficiality, it is a simple statement that when eyes are opened by joy, spiritually good things such as marriage and pageantry and the rights and rites of the home are finally seen as the golden things that they are.

Almost half-way through the book, it appears that all will be set right by the ebullience of one man. But can happiness endure on such a foundation? What if joy is an attractive but ultimately untrue vision of what the world is actually like? And who is this man anyway?

The characters and the reader receive a terrible jolt mid-way through the book, and reader and character alike begin to doubt whether the palace that Beacon House has become is just a castle in the air. Is this man a thief? A sadist? A polygamist? A psychotic criminal? A murderer?

The hilarious unfolding of events that follows contains a serious answer to the main question of the book: is joy insane? Considering the Latin meaning of *insanus*, 'unhealthy,' is joy unhealthy, because there is no spiritual good to be joyful about? Is life really, as one of the characters puts it: 'all rather flat and a failure?' Is the world just 'made like that... it's all survival?'

The real value of such questions lies not in their tone of despair but in their appreciation of the fact that joy and activity are too often associated with false ideals or even downright chicanery. In a world where the mantles of 'orthodox Catholic' or 'traditional Catholic' or 'faithful to the Magisterium' can hide both foolishness and deceit, and lead men and women who sincerely wish to follow Christ astray, joy seems even more a chimera now than it did in Chesterton's time. And yet Chesterton by turns follows and leads his protagonists to true hope and invites us to accompany him.

Manalive is a parable of the struggle with acedia, and every part of it in some way wrestles with one of the hydra-heads of this vice. Each head is squarely aimed at with a loaded gun that 'deals life' instead of death. ■

Did Chesterton Predict Brexit?

by Karl Schmude

Following the British referendum last June to leave the European Union (EU), there was considerable comment in newspapers, blogs and social media, about Chesterton's famous poem, 'The Secret People'.

The poem was published in 1907, and the lines especially noted were:

*Smile at us, pay us, pass us; but do not quite forget;
For we are the people of England, that never have spoken yet.*

In the London 'Catholic Herald' (July 1, 2016), the paper's Deputy Editor, Dan Hitchens (pictured), looked at the new relevance of the poem in the light of Brexit. Chesterton's prophecy of an English revolution in which the people, long disenfranchised and frustrated, would rise up against their arrogant rulers, seemed remarkably apposite more than a century later.

Hitchens quoted the Cambridge scholar and Chesterton author, Michael Hurley:

'The Secret People' is about refusing the condescension implied by a governing class and by an educated class.

Hurley commented that he had received emails quoting the lines, 'the people of England, that never have spoken yet,' and saying: 'Well, they've spoken now.'

Yet Hitchens points out that there is not a simple match between Chesterton's view of a popular uprising and the circumstances leading to Brexit.

Chesterton saw other factors at work apart from the snobbery and self-righteousness of the dominant elites, such as the impact of the Reformation in dissolving the monasteries and selling them to the rich, thereby robbing the poor of a place of shelter and food: 'Till there was no bed in a monk's house, nor food that man could find.'

Hitchens quotes from a Chesterton essay on the English poor, published around the time of his poem:

*Caught in the trap of a terrible industrial machinery,
harried by a shameful economic cruelty, surrounded with*



an ugliness and desolation never endured before among men, stunted by a stupid and provincial religion, or by a more stupid and more provincial irreligion, the poor are still by far the sanest, jolliest, and most reliable part of the community.

Given Chesterton's emphasis on the enslaving economic conditions of modern society, to the point where he believed that true democracy was incompatible with modern capitalism, Hitchens notes the comment of the philosopher, John Milbank, founder of the Anglo-Catholic movement known as Radical Orthodoxy. Milbank suggested that those quoting 'The Secret People' have missed the point, since the 'real enemy' of the secret people is 'anarchic, libertarian, globalizing capitalism', which 'duped them' into voting for Brexit.

England's poor, in Milbank's view, have little in common with the leaders of the Leave campaign in the Brexit referendum. The secret people Chesterton loved 'are the real Catholic voice of England, exulting at once in true hierarchic order, popular participation and continuous festivity, against the puritans and dissenters who love money and success too much.'

While Milbank speculates that Chesterton would have voted to remain in the EU, not least because Brexit increased the likelihood of what Chesterton would have feared, a German-dominated Europe, another Chesterton scholar, Julia Stapleton, argues that he would have supported Brexit, since he 'loved the nation but loathed the state' – and just as the British state in his time was centralised and run for the benefit of elites, so he would have seen the EU in our time in the same light.

Hitchens notes, however, that 'The Secret People' is too good a poem to be reduced to a single political message. It is, he said, 'a cry for social justice more eloquent and less despairing than anything the British commentariat have come up with [in the aftermath of Brexit].' ■

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Society Membership

The annual membership fee of the Australian Chesterton Society is \$30.00 for 2017. The fee of \$25.00 has been unchanged for many years, and has been increased to \$30.00 as a result of rising costs, including postage. Subscriptions may be sent to the Secretary/Treasurer, Mr Ray Finnegan, at the address opposite, or by electronic transfer –

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Defending The Fences

In a column in the 10 September 2016 issue of the London 'Spectator' (now included in the Australian 'Spectator'), Rory Sutherland (pictured) invoked a passage of Chesterton's to underscore what he called 'a simple defence of conservatism':

*There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say, for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, 'I don't see the use of this; let us clear it away.' To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: 'If you don't see the use of it, I certainly won't let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it. ('The Drift from Domesticity,' in *The Thing*, 1929)*

Sutherland, a British advertising executive with a Cambridge degree in Classics, writes a regular column for the 'Spectator', under the title of 'The Wiki Man', on technology and the internet.

In his view, Chesterton's comment helps to justify a suspicion of today's experts – 'a huge cast of well-paid people, from management consultants to economic advisers, whose entire salaries are earned by ripping out Chesterton's fences.'

They tend to reinvent things for the sake of conceptual neatness and presumed efficiency, and all too hastily remove things they have not paused to understand.

As examples, Sutherland cites a single European currency or the removal of the monarchy as 'intellectual enthusiasms rarely shared by ordinary folk, [which] seem to make perfect



sense until you think long and hard about what the hidden virtues of the previous irrational arrangement might be.'

For example, the advantage of disproportional representation is that 'it allows you thoroughly to purge bad governments – which is probably the most important attribute of democracy.'

Sutherland argues that the present-day dominance of experts, especially in technology, has resulted in these companies 'partly wrecking the advertising industry – and journalism along with it – under the guise of efficiency'. They fail to understand that, 'like a peacock's tail, advertising is not really about efficiency'; that its power rests largely on its being perceived as expensive and the products it promotes as already popular, so that pursuing a narrowly rationalist approach to it is self-defeating.

'You could certainly save money,' writes Sutherland, 'by inviting people to your wedding in an email, but not many people would turn up.' ■



Bishop Robert Barron

American TV Bishop on Chesterton

The Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles, Robert Barron, has recently paid tribute to the appeal of G.K. Chesterton.

Bishop Barron is a well-known TV presenter and media commentator in America, earning comparison with Archbishop Fulton Sheen for having a regular national program on a commercial TV network. His 10-part documentary, *The Catholicism Project*, was televised from 2011 on most public television stations in America, and most recently a new series, *Catholicism: The Pivotal Players*, has been shown, in which Chesterton is one of six prominent people profiled.

Speaking at the 35th Annual Conference of the American Chesterton Society, Bishop Barron recalled that he became a 'passionate Chestertonian' in the 1970s and 80s when the Church was embroiled in intellectual turmoil.

'It gave me a light and a point of reference during a confusing time,' he said. Chesterton was a 'happy warrior' in defending the faith, at a time when there were many 'angry warriors'.

The Bishop noted Chesterton's deep attitude of love and joy. 'Every page of Chesterton is like a bottle of champagne.'

If Chesterton Had Been Irish?

Chesterton had a special regard for the Irish poet, politician and soldier, Thomas Kettle (1880-1916), pictured, whom he said was 'perhaps the greatest example of that greatness of spirit which was so ill-rewarded on both sides of the channel: a wit, a scholar, an orator, a man ambitious in all the arts of peace.'

In an article in the London 'Catholic Herald' (March 4, 2016), entitled 'If Chesterton had been Irish,' Michael Duggan reported Kettle's praise for Chesterton. Kettle regarded Chesterton as 'the wisest pen in English letters,' summing him up in these words:

There is in his mere sanity a touch of magic so potent that, although incapable of dullness, he has achieved authority, and although convinced that faith is more romantic than doubt, or even sin, he has got himself published and read.

Kettle was deeply engaged in the Irish independence movement, but his approach, in contrast with that of Michael Collins (another great Chesterton devotee), was constitutional reform rather than violent rebellion.



Kettle was distraught at the execution of the Irish leaders at the time of the 1916 Easter Rising.

In a sonnet written days before this event, entitled 'to My Daughter Betty, the Gift of God,' Kettle seemed to foresee his fate (he volunteered for the Western front in 1914 and was killed in the Battle of the Somme). He said that he died

*Not for flag, nor King, nor Emperor
But for a dream, born in a herdsman's shed
And for the secret Scripture of the poor. ■*

'The Invisible Man' - and the Origins of Latin Literature

A famous Chesterton insight has been invoked by a reviewer in the London Times Literary Supplement (April 29, 2016) to illustrate the themes of a new book, *Beyond Greek: The Beginning of Latin Literature*, by Denis Feeney. The reviewer, **Emily Wilson**, teaches in the Department of Classical Studies at the University of Pennsylvania:

In a famous short story by G.K. Chesterton, 'The Invisible Man,' the murderer enters the house of the victim observed by several witnesses. But they all claim that they saw 'nobody,' because the killer was dressed as a postman.

The situation of watching a person in the correct uniform delivering the mail was too common to register as an event. Chesterton's hero, Father Brown, specializes in noticing the commonplace things that nobody else can see because they have become too familiar.

Denis Feeney's new book, *Beyond Greek*, on the origins of Roman literature, is very much in the mode of Father Brown, asking us to be amazed and puzzled by things so familiar that we do not bother to think about them.

The book sheds surprising light on three interrelated well-known facts – three invisible postmen – in the history of Roman literature. The first is that the Romans wrote literature at all – a fact which, as Feeney makes clear, was by no means

Adapting Chesterton for Television?

In an article on 30 July 2016, Sam Leith, Literary Editor of the London 'Spectator', asked why the major TV networks in the UK focus only what he called 'classy costume drama,' of the sort you might find in Penguin Classics and largely confined to the 19th century. Dickens, Tolstoy, Jane Austen are all well covered – but then what?

Leith suggests that the net should be cast more widely – by adapting minor books by major writers, or 'fine, neglected books from second-string writers as they slip out of the canon; or outright bad books from writers who were never quite in the canon in the first place.'

He nominates several authors and works, including Chesterton. Why not his *The Man Who Was Thursday*, Leith asks, which 'is quite as strange and intriguing as you could want from a surrealist spy movie?'

inevitable. The second is that they learnt Greek – the language of a people they had conquered. The third, which does not follow from the second, is that they also translated Greek literature into Latin, and imitated Greek literary models – an action unparalleled in the ancient world. ■

The Nativity

by G.K. Chesterton

Apart from essays on Christmas every year, Chesterton wrote many poems during this season. One of the earliest was 'The Nativity,' written in 1897 when he was only in his early 20s and searching for his intellectual and spiritual path, without necessarily realizing it would finally lead to Christianity.

The poem highlights the profound influence on his mind and sensibility of Mary as a pathway to Jesus. As he wrote in his essay, 'Mary and the Convert,' Our Lady, 'reminding us especially of God Incarnate, does in some degree gather up and embody all those elements of the heart and the higher instincts, which are the legitimate short cuts to the love of God.' (*The Well and the Shallows*, 1935)

The American scholar, Ralph C. Wood of Baylor University, author of *Chesterton: The Ultimate Goodness of God* (2011), has noted that Chesterton exalted Christmas as the Feast of the Nativity rather than the Incarnation, and that this early poem, 'The Nativity,' contains two 'splendid Marian moments,' one at the beginning and the other at the end.

The thatch of the roof was as golden,
Though dusty the straw was and old,
The wind was a peal as of trumpets,
Though blowing and barren and cold.
The mother's hair was a glory,
Though loosened and torn,
For under the eaves in the gloaming—
A child was born.

Oh! if man sought a sign in the deepest,
That God shaketh broadest His best;
That things fairest, are oldest and simplest,
In the first days created and blest.
Far flush all the tufts of the clover,
Thick mellows the corn,
A cloud shapes, a daisy is opened—
A child is born.

Though the darkness be noisy with systems,
Dark fancies that fret and disprove;
Still the plumes stir around us, above us,
The wings of the shadow of love.
Still the fountains of life are unbroken,
Their splendour unshorn;
The secret, the symbol, the promise—
A child is born.

In the time of dead things it is living,
In the moonless grey night is a gleam;
Still the babe that is quickened may conquer,
The life that is new may redeem.
Ho! princes and priests, have ye heard it?
Grow pale through your scorn;
Huge dawns sleep before us, stern changes—
A child is born.

And the mother still joys for the whispered
First stir of unspeakable things;
Still feels that high moment unfurling
Red glories of Gabriel's wings.
Still the Babe of an hour is a master,
Whom angels adorn,
Emmanuel, Prophet, Anointed—
A child is born.

To the rusty barred doors of the hungry,
To the struggle for life and the din;
Still with brush of bright plumes and with knocking,
The kingdom of God enters in.
To the daughters of patience that labour,
That weep, and are worn;
One moment of love and of laughter—
A child is born.

And till man and his riddle be answered,
While earth shall remain and desire;
While the flesh of a man is as grass is,
And the soul of a man as a fire.
While the daybreak shall come with its banner,
The moon with its horn;
It shall stay with us, that which is written—
A child is born.

And for him who shall dream that the martyr
Is vanished, and love but a toy;
That life lives not through pain and surrender,
Living only through self and its joy.
Shall the Lord God erase from the body
The oath he hath sworn?
Bend back to thy work, saying only—
A child is born.

