



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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A Chesterton Meditation at Christmas

by Karl Schmude



In *The Resurrection of Rome* (1930), Chesterton argued that Christian truth can never be fully expressed but only faintly indicated by something startlingly plain or startlingly beautiful.

"It can be weakly suggested by the thirst and desolation of the desert, which seems to extort the cry of prophecy like a cry of pain. It can also be feebly hinted at by ten thousand trumpets blaring before a golden throne. . . .

"[The Church] must be very high, like the spire of Cologne Cathedral or the tower of Salisbury; or else it must be very low, like the Catacombs or the Cave of Bethlehem."

These images capture the rhythms of the Christian life, which are determined not only by feasts but by fasts. Every great celebration is preceded by a time of preparation; the joy that is tasted depends on a deprived and purified heart.

This order of reality is culturally ingrained in the case of Easter, as the feast of the Resurrection follows Lent, a period commemorating Christ's 40 days of prayer and fasting in the desert.

Christmas, however, is not so readily experienced as the culmination of a fast.

The spiritual season of Advent - meant to induce a penitential preparation for Christmas - tends to be nullified by our social pattern of parties and gift-buying.

By its nature a credit-card economy postpones indefinitely the penitential experience, including that part of the experience which involves paying off debts.

Yet the practice of penance and the presentation of gifts are not finally incompatible. They are, indeed, integral to any Christian - indeed, human -celebration.

They are a special part of the paradox of Christmas - a blending of the extremes which found expression at the first Christmas: the elements of simplicity (an unadorned crib in a stable) and of splendour (the precious gifts brought to the Child Jesus by the Three Kings).

In an age filled with the complications of affluence, it is understandable that the yearning for simplicity should be powerfully felt. When the veteran British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge visited the Holy Land in 1967, he felt inspired by the primitive circumstances of Christ's birth.

Seated in a cave beneath the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, he became uneasy at the religious embellishments of later ages, which he thought were out of place in the stark plainness of Christ's birthplace. In Muggeridge's words:

"The essential point of Christ's birth, as I see it, is that it happened in the humblest and poorest circumstances conceivable. He, who was to be worshipped through 20 centuries by the most ardent spirits and

perceptive minds of a great civilisation, was born more obscurely than probably anyone else that day in the whole world.

“What a stupendous moment in history, though! – when for the first time men were to see their god, not in terms of wealth or power or pulchritude, but of penury, weakness and obscurity.” (London *Observer*, December 24, 1967)

God speaks to man in the desert

In Christian tradition, those who seek to imitate the “penury, weakness and obscurity” of Christ have often been drawn to a life of exceptional harshness – the way of life of the desert.

The desert has served as the setting for a direct encounter with God. The austere heat, the silence and the solitude seem to lay bare the soul. As the French author Ernest Psichari once observed, “it is in the desert that God speaks to man”.

Historically the desert has been the home of the hermit – a distinct spiritual type that bears witness to the value which a society attaches to the solitary life.

Such a life has been strongly recognised in those historical cultures permeated by religious impulses – for example, Christian culture (both Eastern and Western) and Indian. But it is little evident in classical Western culture (Greek and Roman), in Protestant culture, and in the modern secular West.

The characteristic revolt of our age has taken place not as a solitary act but in a communal form, beginning with the hippies movement in the 1960s. We have shunned the rigorous individualism of many other societies – perhaps believing, with Blaise Pascal, that “all the unhappiness of man arises from the fact that he is incapable of abiding quietly in a room”. (Pensees, 116) Or in a desert.

The historian Christopher Dawson noted that a key spiritual difference between previous cultures and our own way of life is that there is now far less opportunity for the solitary life than in the past.

The influence of modern communications technology is pervasive, most notably in recent times through the smartphone. These devices banish silence and solitude. The internet now ensures that we never have to be alone in a room.

No doubt this condition brings much needed companionship, even if it is disembodied and vicarious, but it also makes difficult the experience of simplicity, even severity, that allows us to appreciate splendour more vividly.

Furious opposites

As Chesterton perceived, the paradoxical richness of Christmas, as of Christianity itself, involves keeping alive both these extremes – of combining, as he put it, “furious opposites”; keeping them both, and keeping them both furious.

In the central chapter of *Orthodoxy* (1908), Chesterton elaborated on these paradoxes.

In affirming dignity, Christianity had proclaimed man as the chief of creatures. But in extolling humility, it had recognised him as the chief of sinners.

The paradox of charity is that it pushes love beyond the bounds of reason: it requires us to love unlovable people, and pardon unpardonable acts.

Chesterton realised that the balance between truths is immensely fruitful. The tension is creative. Any attempt to resolve the tension or rationalise it away, as has occurred historically with every heresy when one truth is singled out for undue and all-absorbing emphasis, leads at first to an excitement and a heightening of energy, but finally to a dilution and narrowing of life.

In the mystery of Christmas, we confront the startling truth that God affirmed the value of human life in a setting which negated it. He became a human being in a place unfit for human beings.

Yet, along with the severity was the insertion of splendour. The gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh were brought to a stable.

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Society Membership

The annual membership fee of the Australian Chesterton Society is **\$30.00**, which entitles subscribers to receive the Society’s quarterly newsletter, *The Defendant*.

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Reclaiming the Economy

Conference on a Chesterton Alternative



Part of the audience in Campion's main lecture hall



Garrick Small

The 2019 conference of the Australian Chesterton Society took place on Saturday, October 19, at Campion College in Sydney. It was attended by more than 60 participants from various parts of Australia, and this year included for the first time a guest from New Zealand.

The conference theme was *"Reclaiming the Economy: A Chesterton Alternative"*.

Various speakers addressed the need for an imaginative rethinking of today's economic order, marked as it is by bigness, both within nations and globally – big business corporations, big government and, most recently, big social media networks. They focused on Chesterton's ideas as a creative alternative, which would be a necessary prelude to any practical and political solutions.

Chesterton's social vision of Distributism was a popular articulation of Catholic social teaching. It favoured a wide distribution of ownership, which would help to promote productive enterprise in society, and extend economic freedom as a necessary foundation of social and other freedoms.

The conference speakers were:

- **Dr Garrick Small**, a property specialist who teaches at Central Queensland University. Dr Small presented two papers - one on the marketplace and the family, and a second on the ideas of the 19th century American political economist, Henry George;
- **Rev. Dr Paul Stenhouse MSC***, editor of Australia's oldest Catholic journal, *Annals*, who considered the vital and much-neglected contributions of the 19th century Australian Catholic poet, journalist and social reformer, John Farrell; and
- **Karl Schmude**, President of the Australian Chesterton Society and a member of the Editorial Board of *The Chesterton Review*, who explored the imaginative roots of Distributism in Chesterton's novels and poems.

* Very sadly, Fr Stenhouse passed away a month after the conference. A proper tribute to him will be published in the next *Defendant*.



Panel discussion - from left: Karl Schmude, John Young, and Garrick Small

A special report at the conference was on a Distributist estate called Flandria Village, founded in Argentina in the 1930s by a Belgian migrant, Jules Steverlynk. This venture was inspired by Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* and developed in harmony with Catholic social principles. While the estate no longer exists in its original form, it remains a model of Distributist philosophy at work, and a beacon of hope for all those who see the value of broadly distributed ownership and communal participation as the foundation of a free society.

This was the Australian Chesterton Society's fourteenth national conference. The past ten conferences have been held in Sydney at Campion College, Australia's only institution of higher education offering a foundational undergraduate degree in the liberal arts (<https://www.campion.edu.au/>).

The papers were video-recorded and are available on YouTube and the Australian Chesterton Society's website (<http://chestertonaustralia.com/media.php>), as are the papers presented at recent conferences.

The papers have also been assembled into a publication which is available on request from the Society's Secretary-Treasurer, Mr Gary Furnell, at his address on page 2. The cost is \$25.00 (including postage). ■

Henry George and Private Property

by John Young

A key economic thinker discussed at the 2019 Australian Chesterton conference was the 19th century American, Henry George. Dr Garrick Small presented a paper on George (which will be available in the conference proceedings), and a subsequent comment was offered by **John Young**, a Melbourne-based philosopher who has contributed frequently to The Defendant.



A letter to *G K'S Weekly* (April 11, 1925) urged the land philosophy of Henry George as a measure that should be adopted by Distributism. The editorial response was: "We do not agree with the nationalisation of the land."

That response reveals a tragic misinterpretation of Henry George's position, leading some Catholic social thinkers to dismiss George as a land socialist, and therefore in conflict with Catholic social teaching which insists on the right to private property in land.

I regard the error as tragic because George has so much to offer in relation to the development of Catholic social teaching. He saw the basic economic questions as fundamentally ethical questions and as part of the natural moral law.

He has been called "single tax George", but there is far more to his economic analysis than that. It deals with the relation between capital and labour, the question of free trade, the meaning of economic value, and much else.

For George, the whole economic order is for the sake of the person, who has higher cultural and religious aspirations. His most famous book, *Progress and Poverty*, even has a chapter arguing for the immortality of the human soul! And it has four chapters refuting Malthusianism.

But did he believe in the nationalisation of land? Certainly not. As he explains: "We propose leaving land in the private possession of individuals, with full liberty on their part to give, sell, or bequeath it, simply to levy on it for public uses a tax that shall equal the annual value of the land itself, irrespective of the use made of it or the improvements on it" (*The Condition of Labour*, p. 9).

In other words, the government would take a levy based on the unimproved value of land. If I owned land worth at present \$500,000 without improvements, the government would take an annual amount that would reduce the sale price to a much lower figure - say \$30,000.

The government therefore would be taking revenue arising from the natural advantages of the land, chiefly those due to the social amenities provided by society. This would be instead of taxing labour and investment, as at present.

Under our current system landowners can make a fortune from natural and social benefits attaching to their land, and from land monopolies, while contributing nothing. This is very similar to usury. George's remedy, I maintain, is essential if Distributism is to be fully implemented. Otherwise we have the present situation where high land prices exclude so many people from land ownership, or impose a burden of 30 years or more of tribute to the banks.

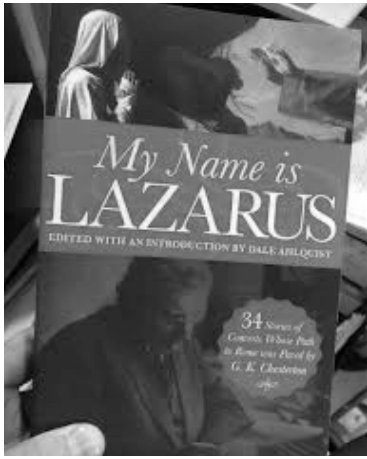
George's position is not land socialism, but a way of ensuring the widespread private ownership of land.

The view that his "remedy" was land socialism arose partly because of his misleading terminology. He had a slogan which he kept repeating: "Land should not be private property; it should be common property." He even spoke of land nationalisation, when the context shows that he really meant the taking of land revenue by the government.

Despite the misleading terminology, his proposal should be clear to anyone reading his works. And it is necessary that it be implemented if the major distortions arising from high land prices are to be overcome.

The reform would need to be introduced gradually, with an increasing levy on the unimproved value of land. This used to be a widespread practice in Australia, with local government basing rates on land value apart from improvements. The Australian Labor Party had this measure as a plank in its platform, but later abandoned it, an abandonment which Clyde Cameron deplored in a talk entitled "How Labor Lost Its Way".

This measure is an essential element in the full implementation of Distributism, for in this way alone can land monopolies be overcome and exorbitant land prices be abolished. ■



The Discovery of a Spiritual Home

by Gary Furnell

Over the years there have been numerous stories of people coming to the Christian faith as a result of Chesterton's inspiration. Last year Dale Ahlquist, President of the American Chesterton Society, highlighted this religious impact by editing a set of contemporary accounts by Catholic converts. **Gary Furnell**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Australian Chesterton Society, reviews *My Name Is Lazarus: 34 Stories of Converts Whose Path to Rome was Paved by G.K. Chesterton* (American Chesterton Society, 2018). See: <https://www.chesterton.org/shop/my-name-is-lazarus/>

M*y Name is Lazarus* provides impressive evidence that the legacy of G.K. Chesterton lives. The book shares the stories of thirty-four people who celebrate Chesterton's role in their search for truth and spiritual home.

Chesterton was himself a convert from youthful agnosticism; he became a High Church Anglican when a young man before embracing Catholicism as a middle-aged man. In every case chronicled in *My Name is Lazarus*, the individual's conversion process took many years. Often there were decades of searching, thinking, reading and conversations before the converts arrived home in the Church.

Each person's story is fascinating and encouraging to read. Of course, in every case there is the mysterious work of illuminating grace.

The majority of these converts are Americans, unsurprisingly since this book is a product of the American Chesterton Society, although some English converts tell their stories, but there is no bland homogeneity of experience.

The stories are individual, as conversion stories must be. One English convert, Emma Fox Wilson, provides a funny, almost eccentric account of her conversion, presenting it very much as work-in-progress. Zubair Simonson tells of his conversion from Islam; he provides insights into the often ambivalent place modern Muslims inhabit when they live in Western cultures. Jewish-born Englishman Robert Asch—a highly educated cosmopolitan person—tells of his journey from Judaism to Catholicism.

Many of the converts tell of moving from various Protestant denominations to the Catholic Church. These stories

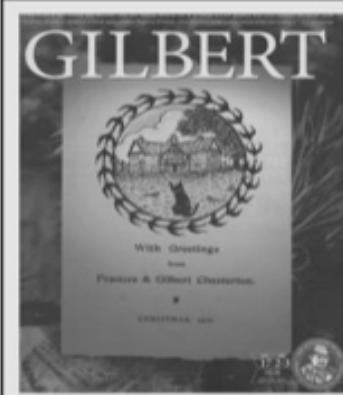
resonated with me because I moved from Anglicanism to Catholicism.

These Protestants were frequently zealous, but over time became deeply frustrated with their experience of a fragmented and narrow Christianity. One convert says, "For me, conversion was not so much a move from false to true, or wrong to right, it was a move from small to large... Inkling of truth I had managed to get so far were given a more spacious home and powerful impact by Catholicism."

Often it wasn't Chesterton, but C.S. Lewis who first gave these frustrated searchers some firmness and direction. Lewis wrote so glowingly of Chesterton that people who revered Lewis, an Anglican, moved on to Chesterton, a Catholic.

Many of the converts from Protestantism speak of the delight they now find in the liturgy, sacraments, seasons, choirs, ornate interior design, bells and smells of the Catholic Church. This is mostly absent, designedly so, in Protestant circles. The order, beauty, tradition and wisdom of the Mass and all that surrounds it are among the rich attractants of Catholicism.

It is obvious that all the converts are avid readers, born when bookshops were common and well-stocked. Many are college or university graduates. Two of Chesterton's books, *Orthodoxy* and *The Everlasting Man*, are repeatedly identified as crucial in the conversion experiences. Like the searchers and finders in *My Name is Lazarus*, they are excellent books to begin exploring the works of the great man - as is *My Name is Lazarus*. It will deepen your appreciation of the love and grace in which we all, at every moment, are immersed. ■



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Storytelling in an Age of Disillusionment: A Chestertonian Perspective

by *Symeon Thompson*

*This article by the Associate Editor of The Defendant, **Symeon J. Thompson**, first appeared in News Weekly, June 2, 2018, and is reprinted with the kind permission of the author as well as the Editor of News Weekly, Peter Kelleher. It was dedicated to the memory of the founder of the Australian Chesterton Society, Tony Evans, who died a few months earlier - in January 2018.*

The world is awash in superheroes and comic book adaptations. They dominate both the small and big screens, attract some of the biggest budgets and stars, and an astonishing number of people are watching.

They have come to be the pre-eminent modern mythology, a pop-cultural exploration of ideas and themes both light and heavy, a shared fund of experiences and understandings. They appeal for the way they blend the fantastical with the real, the moral with the marvellous. They act as a mirror to society, a reflection of people's hopes and concerns.

Participating and being formed

The roots of storytelling go back to ancient religious rites, re-presenting the stories of gods and heroes in ritual form

to act as both a participation in those events and as a way of forming the attitudes of the audience.

This participation is both enlightening and cautionary, emphasising the right way of being by making the spectators go through the story with the hero, feeling with them and learning from their mistakes.

The ending is a purgation or catharsis that rids the spectator of the sins of the hero – sins that they themselves share. As such they not only echo the values of their culture but inherent human values. Their effectiveness comes from the way they affect the audience in their heart and their gut, more so than their head.

Right up to the modern era, therefore, storytelling employed exaggeration for this end. Stories depicted a heightened and selective “reality”, one that grew organically from the values and understandings of the storytellers – values and understandings that were shared by the community at large.

The modern era, however, saw those shared understandings – which were precarious at the best of times – coming apart. In their place, an artificial division between the “popular” and the “artistic” came to the fore, one emphasised by a newly established “critical” class and justly lampooned by G.K. Chesterton and others.

Instead of a heightened reality, the “critical” preference was for a lowered one. Instead of an enchanted world full of possibilities, the preference was for a disenchanted one full of disillusionment.

But people still wanted ripping yarns – penny dreadfuls and potboilers full of drama and peril, romance and adventure. Over time these morphed into comic strips, and later, comic books – dramatic, fantastical tales that encouraged heroism and denounced villainy; stories that

repeated themselves, but in new ways, as if they were echoes or reflections, rather than reproductions.

What began as children's stories became something more. They maintained a childlike belief in adventure and the battle of good and evil but they gained dimensions and depth, much like children growing up and realising that there was more to this adventure than they first realised.

Their creators started deliberately to draw on more. The *X-Men* series, for instance, was influenced by the Holocaust, eugenics and the American civil rights movement; while *Superman* and *Batman* took on the corruption of their society.

2000 saw the cinematic debut of the *X-Men* and the comic book idea, but it was 2008's *Iron Man* that created the juggernaut of multi-part shared universes of heroes and villains, with each instalment being another chapter in a continuing story, much like a comic book or their cartoon adaptations.

Until this time audiences were treated to *Superman* or *Batman* movies with a raft of villains, but a lone central hero. Now there were multiple heroes and multiple villains, and much of the drama was driven by the personal, rather than the peril.

Return of studio system

Apart from the ideas they represent and the ways in which they strive to fashion works that are both popular and artistic, superhero movies also represent the triumphant return of the studio system.

Maligned for decades for the way they apparently forced creative types to act against their better judgement, now the studios are in control. This means that the "creatives" have a lot of leeway – but they must create within the confines of a structure.

As artists learned throughout the centuries, such restrictions do not kill creativity, but rather, push it in new directions by subordinating the individual's will to the tradition in which they operate. Ideas are explored, but, as in Greek tragedy or Shakespearian drama, they are explored viscerally, and their exploration does not take precedence over the story itself – for the story itself is the central idea.

These tall tales with their unexpected depths and their mass appeal have their flaws, but their strength is in their very humanity. That humanity is heightened and exaggerated, much as it was in the Greek myths; and, much like in the Greek myths, it does not distance us from them but can make us reflect on our own heroisms and villainies. ■

Chesterton and Belloc books available



A noted author on Distributism, Dr Race Mathews, and a long-time member of the Australian Chesterton Society, is wishing to downsize his Chesterton and Belloc library. It comprises ca. 60 titles including works of fiction, history, biography, and literary criticism as well as various books of essays.

Any reader of *The Defendant* who would be interested in providing a new home for this collection is invited to contact the Editor in the first instance - at: kgschmude@gmail.com; or on 0407 721 458.

The Wisdom of Chesterton

"A religion should not only be instinctively absorbent of whatever is consonant with its ideal; it should also be instinctively resistant to anything that is against that ideal. Men look to a faith to purge them of all native poisons, as well as to develop all native functions and pleasures. A church should have drainage as well as ventilation. It should drive bad smells out as well as let good smells in; it should not only cast out devils, but keep them out." (*Daily News*, March 19, 1910)

"The organic thing called religion has in fact the organs that take hold on life. It can feed where the fastidious doubter

finds no food; it can reproduce where the solitary sceptic boasts of being barren. It may be accepting a miracle to believe in free will; but it is accepting madness, sooner or later, to disbelieve in it. It may be a wild risk to make a vow; but it is a quiet, crawling and inevitable ruin to refuse to make a vow.

"It may be incredible that one creed is the truth and the others are relatively false; but it is not only incredible, but also intolerable, that there is no truth either in or out of creeds, and all are equally false. For nobody can ever set anything right, if everybody is equally wrong." ("The Return to Religion," *The Well and the Shallows*, 1935)

Chesterton - An Aspiring Cricketer?

by Karl Schmude

An intriguing reference to Chesterton as a cricketer appeared in a London *Spectator* column (July 27, 2019) by Tim Rice, a British author and lyricist who co-wrote the music for the animated movie, *The Lion King* (1994).

Rice recalled the famous amateur cricket team which J.M. Barrie, creator of *Peter Pan*, founded. It was named the Allahakbarries, not only in honour of Barrie himself, but in the mistaken belief that 'Allah hu akbar' meant 'Heaven help us' in Arabic (rather than 'God is great').

The team, which was active from 1890 to 1913, featured most of the literary giants of the age. It included, apart from Chesterton, P.G. Wodehouse, Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

Some were seriously good players, others much less so.

Conan Doyle, for example, played first-class cricket in England and once dismissed W.G. Grace, while Wodehouse was a star bowler in his school side at London's Dulwich College. Tim Rice notes that Wodehouse immortalised the Warwickshire fast bowler Percy Jeeves, an England prospect killed in the Great War, when he created English literature's most famous gentleman's gentleman, Jeeves, the valet of Bertie Wooster.

To have in one cricket side, as Rice notes, the creators of Winnie the Pooh, Sherlock Holmes, Jeeves and Bertie Wooster, Peter Pan – and we might add, Father Brown – represented a phenomenal line-up.

They were, in Rice's words, "united in their love of the drama, excitement, literacy and intelligence of cricket. And at times by the stillness, the inaction, the torpidity, the languid progress of the game — aspects of life that cricket truly reflects amid our turbulent times and our



J.M. Barrie's cricket side, the Allahakbarries. There's no indication that Chesterton is present, though, curiously, the player seated third from the right, who is listed as J.M. Barrie in the photo, bears a passing resemblance to the young Chesterton!

desperate need for instant gratification."

Rice makes no mention of Chesterton's cricketing prowess, which prompts the supposition that his ability may have matched that of Barrie and some of the other literary players.

Asked to describe his bowling, Barrie noted both its slow pace and lack of direction. He bowled so slowly that if he didn't like what he had delivered he had time to walk down the wicket and retrieve the ball before it reached the batsman. He also said that, after delivering the ball, he could go and sit on the turf at mid-off and wait for it to reach the other end - which 'it sometimes did'!

Barrie and Chesterton were great friends. He was, wrote Chesterton in his autobiography, "of all friends the least egotistical" with his "humorous self-effacement".

Tim Rice concludes:

"I see a lot of myself in J.M. Barrie. Not, I hasten to add, in literary terms — nor in terms of size, for Barrie was barely five feet tall in his socks — but as a cricketer. His skills with bat and ball appear to be similar to mine. The less said about them the better I suppose, but when I bat, to be able to call 'wait' is a result. . . .

"[T]hrough the Allahakbarries [Barrie] found great companionship, enjoyment and temporary escape from aspects of a wider imperfect world.

"How reassuring to feel, for a few hours every other summer weekend, that the most serious problems in life are within the boundaries of a cricket field. Hakuna matata."*

Barrie wrote a 40-page book on his team, *Allahakbarries C.C.*, which was published privately in 1890 and in a revised version in 1899. In 1950 it was reprinted with a foreword by Don Bradman. These rare books are now highly sought by collectors.

In 2011 the English author and journalist Kevin Telfer published *Peter Pan's First XI*, a book on J.M. Barrie's cricket team.

* "hakuna matata" is a Swahili phrase from East Africa meaning "no worries", which was used in the animated film, *The Lion King*. ■

