

omnipotence to which he has no claim an impotence for which he has no cure.

It may seem rather far-fetched to connect the nonsense about the physical metaphors with the notions about the philosophical despair. But there was a sort of notion about the natural symbols. And even (I will dare to say) a rather more natural connection between the symbol and the thing symbolised than there is in some of those wonderful modern analyses of the meaning of dreams; in which digging up a cabbage and putting it in a hatbox is the spontaneous spiritual expression of a desire to murder your father; or watching a green cat climb a yellow lamp-post the clearest possible way of conveying that you want to bolt with the barmaid. And metaphor does really play a special part in the sort of mad metaphysics that I have in mind; because those who suffer this particular sort of modern softening of the brain have a great tendency to preserve the metaphor long after they have lost the meaning. The figures of speech are like fossil figures of archaic fowls or fishes, made of some stonier deposit and set in the heart of more sandy or crumbling cliffs. The abstract parts of the mind, which should be the strongest, become the weakest; and the mere figures of the fancy, which should be the lightest, become the most heavy and the most hard.

Many must have noticed this, in a newspaper report, and still more in a newspaper criticism. Images that are used as illustrations are repeated without any reference to anything that they illustrate. If the incident of the Rich Young Man in the Gospels had been reported by a local newspaper, we should only be told that the Teacher had called him a camel, and invited him to jump through a needle. If the Death of Socrates were condensed into a journalistic paragraph, there would be no room for the remarks on immortality, and not much even for the cup of hemlock; but only a special mention and perhaps a special caption, of a request to somebody to buy a cock. This often makes the art of illustrative argument a somewhat delicate and even dangerous occupation. When we know that people will remember the metaphor, even when they cannot realise the meaning, it is a little perilous to choose metaphors with mere levity even if they are quite consistent with mere logic. Suppose I say in

some political case that England had better go the whole hog, as did, indeed, some of those followers of Tariff Reform who were called Whole-Hoggers, I shall have to be very careful to explain, somehow, that I am not really identifying the English with hogs, but that it is only some bright facets of the hog that I compare with my beloved country, and that the quality in question is only a special and spiritual sort of hoggishness. Otherwise the audience remembering everything I said about the pig, and forgetting everything I said about the point, will go away under the impression that I addressed them as swine. They will attribute to me certain familiar and even old-fashioned depreciations of the English as that England is stupid, or England is stubborn; in short, that England is, in the apt and appropriate phrase, pig-headed. There will go along with this, other notions, equally true and trustworthy; as that England has four trotters and a snout, not to mention a little curly tail behind. But, in fact, I may, in a pure spirit of lyric praise, compare my country to a pig, so long as I am thinking of the noble and exalted aspects of a pig; as that he gives us the glorious gift of bacon, or that he is said to be highly delicate and chivalrous in his relations to his lady-love; or that being rejected by Turks and Jews, he has almost become a sacred emblem of Christendom.

AUGUST 17, 1935

The Continuing Power of Christianity

A curious accident led me lately to stumble over an incident which happened some time ago. It was concerned with one of the most interesting men of our time; and also one of the problems which are peculiar to our civilisation and our time. I give the story as I heard it; it reflects on nobody, whether it is true or untrue.

It seems that Mr. Eric Gill, the distinguished sculptor, was engaged to erect a sculptural memorial for the League of Nations, expressing that need for Peace which is now the most direct and vital, not to say deadly, necessity, for all Christians and for all sane men. Apparently he planned a design which involved a Christian symbol; and this was resisted, on the ground that non-Christians might not accept it. I suspect that it was not so much a question of the non-Christians outside Europe as of the Anti-Christians inside Europe. It is very unlike all the little I know of the intellectual leaders of those who follow Confucius or Buddha to object especially to a mystical emblem connected with Christ; and nobody supposes that anybody except leaders and intellectuals has very much to say in such modern political problems. And as for Islam, it is enough to say that Christ is already given at least as high a place by all Moslems as He is by many Modernists.

What produces a practical embarrassment in this case is the sincere and savage hatred felt by many Europeans for the religion of their own European past. And this interests me, simply as a historical comparison, because it is really a historical curiosity. It is a difficulty quite peculiar to Christendom. There does not seem to have been anything like it in Paganism. In the last phase of Paganism there was every sort of doubt; there was every sort of denial; but there was not this particular sort of difficulty. The old gods were once perhaps really worshipped as gods; they were then enjoyed as legends; they were even treated lightly as jokes; but they were never hated as symbols. There may have been a time, though I rather doubt it, when people did actually believe that Apollo drove a golden chariot through the sky; but, anyhow, long after Apollo had become an abstraction, an allegory of music or poetry, a tradition that nobody but the most remote rustics took quite seriously, there was most certainly no sculptor from one end of the Roman Empire to the other who would have felt any difficulty, or found any difficulty, in carving Apollo as driving a chariot. The heathens grew cold towards their religion, or even contemptuous of their religion, but they never had any irritation against it that could make them refuse to use its images, or its imagery, in the realm of imagination.

There must have been multitudes of intellectuals, living on the tradition of Euripides or Lucian, who took even a bitter or mocking or pessimistic view of the gods; or simply thought there were no such things as gods in the world; but they would never have objected to gods as graven images. I never heard of any case of any heathen sceptics becoming iconoclasts; and going out and smashing the popular deities as a protest on behalf of abstract truth. They accepted the lyre of Apollo or the wand of Mercury, just as we still accept a Cupid on a Valentine or a nymph on a stone fountain. We may say that the cupid has been vulgarised and is no longer truly a god. We may say that the nymph has met the gorgon, and been turned to stone. And they may have known in their hearts that their religion was dead. But because it was dead, they had even less desire to make exhausting efforts to kill it. If Christianity were really one of the cults studied in comparative religion, if it were really, as its critics sometimes say, a thing made up of materials borrowed from Paganism, if it were really only the last myth or ritual of the long undying death of the Roman Empire, then there is no reason why its symbolism should not be used forever by anybody; as the symbolism of nymphs and cupids is still used forever by anybody. The real reason is that this religion does differ in one detail from all those ancient and beautiful religions. It is not dead. Everybody knows in his heart that it is not dead; and none better than those who want it to die.

The people arranging for the Peace Memorial of the League of Nations would not have the slightest objection to covering it with signs and symbols which were once religious. They would not object to a statue of Peace holding the olive branch like a statue of Minerva; they would not object to a symbolic figure of Sunrise which had the lyre or the horses of Apollo; they would not be annoyed if somebody conceived womanhood under the form of Diana hunting or manhood under the form of Hercules at rest. All these things are now really an allegory. And if Christians could accept so trifling a modernist modification of their view as to agree that Christianity is dead, they could safely go on using all their great historical and hagiological wealth of imagery and illustration; and nobody would object to ten thousand angels or a million martyrs or any number of

crosses and haloes. But the ground of the resistance is that the whole modern comparison between the decline of Paganism and the decline of Christianity is false. Paganism, in the historic sense of Polytheism, did decline once and for all. Christianity has declined twenty times; but nobody who hated it was ever quite certain that it was dead. The rationalist historians of the nineteenth century found it easy to trace in a curve the rise and fall of a religion. They showed very lucidly, to their own satisfaction, that such a historical monstrosity was first a myth, and then a superstition, and then a tradition, and then an abstraction and an allegory. And what they wrote was largely true, if they had happened to be writing the history of Jupiter-Ammon. But as a history of post-Pagan Europe, commonly called Christendom, it is simply not true. It is not the story of something that ruled the whole world, as a pagan deity ruled the whole city. It is not the story of something which was lost when a man left his own city, and enlarged his mind by considering the gods of other cities. It did not begin by being so powerful as Paganism; it never came to being so impotent as Paganism. It was the story of something that was unsafe at its safest and living still at its lowest; something which is always coming out of the Catacombs and going back again; something that is never entirely acceptable when it appears, and never entirely forgotten when it disappears.

It is this utterly unique and even unnatural vigilance that can alone explain a difficulty like that raised about the graven image of Peace. It is that even in proclaiming political peace it proclaims spiritual war. Its things cannot be used as dead things to deck out any alien triumph; we will not be the skeleton at any pagan feast or the corpse for any scientific body-snatching. But, quite apart from our various individual views on such questions of philosophy, there remains a very practical problem of history. These mysteries are the background of the modern European's past, just as those myths were the background of the most sceptical Pagan's past. And the matter can be put to a perfectly practical test. If you had told one of the last Greek sculptors that he must not represent anything out of the great Greek myths, he would probably have answered, "What shall I represent?" These things were the whole imagery of his imagination. If

you tell an artist of the Christian culture, whatever his opinions, that he is to represent peace or charity or universal love by a familiar and obvious emblem—what is the poor devil to do? Pause and think of that point; for it is a perfectly practical point. What *are* the popular emblems of peace, if we are to cut out all that comes from myths or mysteries or the past?

AUGUST 24, 1935

Historical Logic and Historical Fact

There is a truth of logic which the most simple person should be able to see, but which some of the most scholarly people evidently cannot see. It is that there is a limit to the explorations of the expert inside a subject; when he comes to the external fact that is evident to everybody outside. A man may know ten times, or twenty times, or twenty million times more than I do about the technical tactics of the Battle of Waterloo. But if he asserts as an expert that he knows that Napoleon won the Battle of Waterloo, then I do know something that he does not know; I know that he is wrong. He may urge all sorts of things that may be arguable in themselves; that Napoleon was a greater general than Wellington; that Colborne's manœuvre left a gap in the British line;¹ that this or that description of the last British advance can be proved to be a legend or a lie; but he cannot alter the fact that encloses all these facts.

A man may be an inexhaustible specialist on the very complicated story of the commission given to Columbus by Ferdinand and Isabella; on the objects for which it was given, or the reasons for which

¹ Sir John Colborne, First Baron Seaton (1778-1863). Chesterton's argument is ironic: Colborne's charge on the French Old Guard at Waterloo is taken by some historians as the action that won the battle for the Allies.

itself to Alfred translating Boethius, or to Edward the Confessor talking to his friends from Normandy. Oddly enough, we had much more of this intellectual internationalism even when we were a much more insular nation. There is much exaggeration, in both directions, in the debates about the "spacious times" of Queen Elizabeth. Elizabethan politics were not so spacious as is implied by some, nor even so patriotic as is implied by others. They were several centuries nearer to the internationalism of the Middle Ages. They had not a little of the cruelties and exaggerations of the Middle Ages. But, anyhow, they were in one way more spacious than the modern ages: in the fact that Queen Elizabeth could talk Greek and Latin and Italian probably with greater fluency than Mrs. Pankhurst or any modern Feminist. It was still true of the later period; the period of our most insular and almost insolent patriotism. In the age of Nelson or the elder Pitt, England was almost wholly national, and in the common sense not at all international. But that did not prevent Pitt, in Parliament, from invoking the authority of Virgil upon the future of Africa; or Lady Hamilton being painted as a Greek goddess according to an Italian school of art. It is a pity if all the advantages even of the Grand Tour are to be lost after the Great War; and still more unlucky if such separatism is to be the only price of peace.

OCTOBER 26, 1935

Self-Expression and Political Views

We all remember a phase of philosophic gossip, perhaps more general a few years ago but still fairly common, which consisted of persons claiming what they called the right of Self-Expression. It usually took the form of some earnest youth or maiden saying with some indignation, "I have an individuality; I wish to develop my individuality; I wish to express my individuality." All of which was, up to

a point, very nice and natural; and in many cases the result of real grievances against stupid repressions and restraints. But a difficulty, about those who thus wished to express themselves, was that they did not always express themselves very well. They may or may not have expressed their individualities, but they did not really express their meaning. Nor indeed is it altogether easy to define the meaning of individuality. It may be easier for those who have the quaint idea that a derivation is a definition. But in this case we heard very little even of the derivation. For instance, if the indignant youth were to say to me, "I have an individuality," he might not think me very polite if I inclined my head in benevolent assent and answered, "Yes; you are an atom." Yet the Greek word atom is very nearly the same as the Latin word individual. An atom merely means a thing that cannot be cut up, and an individual merely means a thing that cannot be divided. But the general impression about an atom was that it was something too small to be cut up. And it would be very rude to suggest this to the earnest young man. He would not like to be compared to a microscopically minute, monotonously imitative, tiny little hard grain of dead matter; and it would be possible to use the same unamiable sophistry even about his claim to the word individuality. It would not brighten or soften our cheery little chat to say to him, "Yes, there is perhaps inside you some sort of speck of primordial stuff, without parts, without magnitude, without anything that could make possible any kind of variety or complexity in your character, a sort of rude and rudimentary minimum of bare existence, which would remain barren under any attempt at analysis, and which really has no characteristic of any kind, except being next to nothing. Ah, yes; as you say, you have indeed an individuality." If I were to talk like that, I sincerely trust that the young man would instantly indulge in a vigorous and even violent exercise of Self-Expression; but it would not at all resemble the quiet conversation of an atom.

I trust I need not explain that I know as much as most people (which is not much) about what has since happened to the atom; and how it is not any longer an atom in Greek, though it still is an atom in English. I will not enquire here whether the youth would

be more edified at being called an electron, which certainly suggests more activity and effect on others; though whether it is used merely to electrify them, or electrocute them, or even to electroplate them, is indeed a problem of that perverse riddle of personality which can never be really explained in terms of either proton or protoplasm. Only it may be suggested that personality as it exists in practice, the real human variety and distinction which makes one man electrify a friend or the other electrocute a foe, generally seems itself the product of these external ethical acts; so that a man creates his real personality by the activities chosen by his will; or does really, in the old religious sense of the phrase, make his soul. Anyhow, it may be doubted whether he can, at the very beginning, make a soul merely by expressing a self.

But there is another nuisance connected with this business of Self-Expression. In all sorts of political and practical affairs, this sort of exhibitionism has lately been making a very painful exhibition of itself. I mean that people seem to have fallen into a habit of saying violent and decisive things, of swearing the most sweeping and final vows, of dogmatically affirming the most dogmatic certitudes, of using the language of iron creeds and rigid renunciations—and all solely and entirely as a mode of momentary Self-Expression; and no more binding on the speakers or swearers than if they had merely cursed to relieve their feelings or whistled to keep up their spirits. In an instant of indignation against some foreign ruler, a man will model himself on Dr. Parker, who shouted in the pulpit, "God damn the Sultan!" But he will no more expect to be held seriously to what he said afterwards than if he had merely said, "Damn the doorscraper!" when he barked his shins on it in the dark. The man who falls over the doorscraper does not really hold as a dogma that doorscrapers have souls which can be condemned on the Day of Judgment; and Dr. Parker did not really mean that he wished anybody, even Abdul Hamid, to be so condemned. It was merely Self-Expression; and it is becoming not only a deleterious but a dangerous habit in public life.

It is not a party question, as they say of things that are unquestionable and obvious in all parties. An ordinary Conservative will begin by saying that never, never will he clasp the bloody hand of

the murderous Bolsheviks. And then, a little while after, there is a turn in the tides of commerce, a change in the tone of the newspapers, a convenient compromise supported by the experienced Government officials; in short, there is an opportunity for doing a deal—and instantly our honest patriot will not only forswear himself, but actually forget what he has sworn. For he was not really swearing as a man swears over the Bible; but only as a man swears over the doorscraper. He was not like a man binding himself for life to the recognition of the Ten Commandments; he was only a man who had just read in the paper the horrific headlines about the horrible murder of the Russian Princesses. In the same way, an ordinary Liberal will begin by denouncing Frenchmen for persecuting Germans; and go on to denouncing Germans for persecuting Jews. That in itself might be quite consistent; but he does not, in fact, care at all about his consistency. If the two occasions are far enough apart for everybody, including himself, to have forgotten the details of his first denunciation, there will be simply no consistency or common quality at all in his two pictures of the Prussian; the lamb shorn by the Gauls or the lion devouring the Hebrews.

For the truth is that he is not in either case trying to describe the Prussian. The truth is that he is only, in each case, trying to describe himself—as he is at that particular moment and may never be again. In other words, he is trying to Express himself. As for the third political section, we all know that some of its best and most sympathetic characters have just given a most interesting exhibition of this intellectual insecurity of modern views. Nothing was more common among Socialists and Labour men, until quite lately, than an absolute and final refusal of all arms, armaments and military service, and even of any possible form of bodily conflict under any possible provocation. There is a new twist in the tangle of international affairs; another foreign ruler does something they do not happen to like; and instantly the great oath of peace that was written on the heavens is washed away as if it had been written on the waters. For, though it was quite sincere, it was not really an oath at all, except as a form of Self-Expression. . . . I do not think the earnest young man's theory of Self-Expression really works out very well.

JANUARY 4, 1936

The Alternative to the Family

It seems that the Bolshevik State has been moved to make an attempt to restore the Family; and I only hope that the Capitalist State will be inspired to attempt the same difficult task. For in this, it can be truly said, all we like sheep have gone astray; and very like sheep indeed. Nothing strikes me more about the modern drift from domesticity than the fact that it is really only a drift, and not even a drive; that it consists of people following a fashion rather than a heresy; that is, of each person acting not because he is individually convinced, but because he is collectively influenced. The sheep do not follow even a wicked shepherd; the sheep simply follow each other. We know, of course, that there has been a certain parade of originality and ethical defiance in the limited number of sheep who really like showing off. But we have really had very little of the real evil intentions of the wolf in sheep's clothing. What we have had is the pathetic masquerade of the sheep in wolf's clothing. We have seen the sort of suburban intellectual, who dare not fail to catch his train or to keep his job, going off and masquerading in plays and books as a man ready to murder his wife as a protest against marriage, or his mother as a protest against life. We have seen a great deal of the sham wolf; who is quite different from the sham sheep. But neither one nor the other has really been able to throw off the oppression of mere modern fashions and fads. Neither one nor the other has gone back to the normal principles or even to the normal problems. Nobody ever doubted that marriage is a problem; from the first records of literature and legend it has been treated as a problem play; only the problem play has been treated as a farce. The fact was so familiar that there was no other way of treating it except as a farce. Most of the modern writers of problem plays have got no further than treating the farce in such a way that it is not even funny. To that extent, merely in reference to the problematic nature of the

problem, there has been perhaps a certain amount of liberty, as well as a great deal of licence. A few intellectuals have appeared, if not as the wolf, at least as the goat. Several persons, even eminent persons, have played the goat about the problem. But almost all have been content to be sheep about the solution. They have resembled sheep in a hundred woolly-witted and wool-gathering ways; but most of all in the fact that they never really thought about the solution at all. Let a very small dog bark behind a very large flock of sheep; and the sheep will know what they are fleeing from; but the sheep will not have, even then, the very vaguest idea of where they are going to.

For, after all, in almost all these current controversies, it is true to say that nobody has really discussed *the alternative* to the Family. The only obvious alternative is the State. Even supposing that the extreme anarchist school could prevail in a sort of universal riot of promiscuity, the result could only be that the whole new generation of humanity would be thrown on the resources of the only thing which could be considered responsible for them. There was a good deal of cheap and rather unfair sneering against poor Rousseau, who left one of his children on the doorstep of the Foundling Hospital. It is only fair to Rousseau to say that, if he disowned the child, he did not disown the incident. Many another man, in that pretty immoral society, may have done the same thing; but no other man said so. The one really Christian thing that remained to Rousseau can be found in the very title of his book, which is "Confessions." It is wholesome for a man to ask himself, touching any crime, not only whether he would have the courage to commit it, but whether he would have the courage to confess it, if he did commit it. But though Rousseau has been made a monster of weakness and wickedness, in excess of his deserts, it is true enough that in one sense he typified in this act the beginning of our slipshod and sentimental morals. He did not do so badly as his worst detractors said; but he did do one really indefensible thing; he founded the modern moral system—or lack of system. In that one act of throwing a baby at an institution, he did make himself a guilty partner with posterity; and assisted the whole march of progress and the movements of men much less humane than himself. He

did foreshadow the frightful punishment of mere sex emancipation; which is not anarchy but bureaucracy.

For, given any freedom of that sort, the State does become one vast Foundling Hospital. If families will not be responsible for their own children then officials will be responsible for other people's children. The care of all such things will pass into their hands; because there will be nobody else to notice such a trifle as a living soul born alive into the world. The total control of human life will pass to the State; and it will be a very Totalitarian State. I know there are some who maintain that paid officials will be more devoted than parents; but it is very hard to see on what this can be based, unless it is the pay. Yet there is the whole world, and rather especially the whole modern world, to attest that those who are well paid can be badly bored. Those who imagine that they could not be bored with babies do not know much about babies. We always come back to the unanswerable argument of nature; that there do happen to be one or two persons, who are less bored with one particular very boring baby than everyone else would be. That common sense is the concrete foundation of the family; and no negative reaction against it comes anywhere near to having a positive substitute for it. Those who have a vague idea that educationists could take it in turns or experts divide the baby between them, are simply people who suppose that there can be twenty officials to one citizen. A baby cannot be divided to any general social satisfaction, as Solomon discovered some time ago; and the person who least desires to see it divided will still be the person most likely to take it on as a whole, and as a whole-time job.

Therefore do I publicly salute the great example of Mr. Stalin, who produced his own mother suddenly from some unknown cupboard in the Communist system; and held her up as a new sort of sacred Icon for the inspiration of the Russian people. Therefore do I note with profound interest the new note of his advice to the Soviet society; that it should restore some solidity to the human family. Why did that capable and apparently cynical Georgian indulge in so remarkable a reversal, or even renunciation? I take it that he did so because he and his flock of sheep had come to the end of the

road, down which our own vague and more visionary sheep are still stumbling. It would not be the first time that Communists had learned common sense at the expense of Communism. They began by saying that there must be no war, or, if there was, that it must be conducted by electioneering, and soldiers be indistinguishable from their officers. They ended with the raising of a huge Red Army, to fight the White Army; and since then they have restored the distinction of office and rank in that army. They began by saying there must be no private property, and harried and enslaved hundreds or thousands of peasants in the course of learning that peasants must be allowed to preserve private property. So, by prolonged and extravagant experiment, they have really found out that the family is real; that there is no substitute for it; and certainly no substitute in the vast and vague abstraction of the State. All this is very much to the credit of the Bolsheviks; if it is not altogether to the credit of Bolshevism. They, at any rate, have retained one essential mark of being really alive. They, at any rate, have learned by their own mistakes. I wish I were certain that our own industrial civilisation would do the same.

JANUARY 11, 1936

On "The Phoenix and the Turtle"

How many of my highly cultured readers have really grasped, assimilated, and made their own the poem called "The Phoenix and the Turtle"? I feel as if I were offering a prize in the newspapers for some sort of success with a crossword puzzle; but I can assure the reader that Torquemada never produced anything within a thousand miles of the Turtle and his mystical colleague. Much of the modern public will be divided between those who say "Of course we know our Shakespeare" and those who have entirely forgotten that

Shakespeare ever wrote anything of the sort. And, indeed, the first group is wrong, and the second group is right. Shakespeare never did write anything of the sort, so far as I know, except in this one extraordinary example. On the other hand, we may be fairly certain that those who say they know their Shakespeare do not know their Shakespeare. If they did, they would not fall into the fallacy of supposing that he was theirs. In all this common cultivated acquaintance with the classics there is a certain unconscious trick of omission for which we must always allow. There is even a sort of terrible irony in Matthew Arnold's phrase that culture consists of knowing "the best that has been said and thought." It is only too true that the knowledge of Shakespeare generally means the knowledge of the best things in Shakespeare. Or, at least, of the things which those who were thought the best critics thought were the best things. But there are many more marvellous and fantastic fish in that great sea than ever came out of it. When people say they know their Shakespeare, they generally mean that they know somebody else's Shakespeare; especially the actor's Shakespeare, or the actor-manager's Shakespeare, or the highly modern producer's Shakespeare, or, what is worst of all, the Shakespearean critic's Shakespeare.

It is the same with all the great creations that are stared at like monuments, rather than quarried in like mines. I read a newspaper article the other day in which a man said that he knew the message of the Gospel was quite simple, because he had heard it at his mother's knee. It did not seem to occur to him that his mother might have been a person of some common sense and that she probably read to him the passages that really are simple enough to be suitable to a child. It seems probable that she was sane enough to tell him of the Good Shepherd who goes after the lost sheep; or the welcome to the prodigal returning home; or the love of Christ for all little children. It seems improbable that she asked a child to understand what is meant by the Unjust Steward; or the Eunuchs of the Kingdom of Heaven; or the command to hate father and mother for the Kingdom of God; or the bringing of a sword into the world; or the dark enigma of Judas. Now, most educated people have exactly that memory of an expurgated Shakespeare; as they have of an expurgated