Whats Wrong With the World

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Title: What's Wrong With the World

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To C. F G. Masterman, M. P.

My Dear Charles,

I originally called this book "What is Wrong," and it would have

satisfied your sardonic temper to note the number of social

misunderstandings that arose from the use of the title. Many a mild

lady visitor opened her eyes when I remarked casually, "I have been

doing 'What is Wrong' all this morning." And one minister of religion

moved quite sharply in his chair when I told him (as he understood it)

that I had to run upstairs and do what was wrong, but should be down

again in a minute. Exactly of what occult vice they silently accused me

I cannot conjecture, but I know of what I accuse myself; and that is,

of having written a very shapeless and inadequate book, and one quite

unworthy to be dedicated to you. As far as literature goes, this book

is what is wrong and no mistake.

It may seem a refinement of insolence to present so wild a composition

to one who has recorded two or three of the really impressive visions

of the moving millions of England. You are the only man alive who can

make the map of England crawl with life; a most creepy and enviable

accomplishment. Why then should I trouble you with a book which, even

if it achieves its object (which is monstrously unlikely) can only be a

thundering gallop of theory?

Well, I do it partly because I think you politicians are none the worse

for a few inconvenient ideals; but more because you will recognise the

many arguments we have had, those arguments which the most wonderful

ladies in the world can never endure for very long. And, perhaps, you

will agree with me that the thread of comradeship and conversation must

be protected because it is so frivolous. It must be held sacred, it

must not be snapped, because it is not worth tying together again. It

is exactly because argument is idle that men (I mean males) must take

it seriously; for when (we feel), until the crack of doom, shall we

have so delightful a difference again? But most of all I offer it to

you because there exists not only comradeship, but a very different

thing, called friendship; an agreement under all the arguments and a

thread which, please God, will never break.

Yours always,

G. K. Chesterton.

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A book of modern social inquiry has a shape that is somewhat sharply

defined. It begins as a rule with an analysis, with statistics, tables

of population, decrease of crime among Congregationalists, growth of

hysteria among policemen, and similar ascertained facts; it ends with a

chapter that is generally called "The Remedy." It is almost wholly due

to this careful, solid, and scientific method that "The Remedy" is

never found. For this scheme of medical question and answer is a

blunder; the first great blunder of sociology. It is always called

stating the disease before we find the cure. But it is the whole

definition and dignity of man that in social matters we must actually

find the cure before we find the disease.

The fallacy is one of the fifty fallacies that come from the modern

madness for biological or bodily metaphors. It is convenient to speak

of the Social Organism, just as it is convenient to speak of the

British Lion. But Britain is no more an organism than Britain is a

lion. The moment we begin to give a nation the unity and simplicity of

an animal, we begin to think wildly. Because every man is a biped,

fifty men are not a centipede. This has produced, for instance, the

gaping absurdity of perpetually talking about "young nations" and

"dying nations," as if a nation had a fixed and physical span of life.

Thus people will say that Spain has entered a final senility; they

might as well say that Spain is losing all her teeth. Or people will

say that Canada should soon produce a literature; which is like saying

that Canada must soon grow a new moustache. Nations consist of people;

the first generation may be decrepit, or the ten thousandth may be

vigorous. Similar applications of the fallacy are made by those who see

in the increasing size of national possessions, a simple increase in

wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. These people,

indeed, even fall short in subtlety of the parallel of a human body.

They do not even ask whether an empire is growing taller in its youth,

or only growing fatter in its old age. But of all the instances of

error arising from this physical fancy, the worst is that we have

before us: the habit of exhaustively describing a social sickness, and

then propounding a social drug.

Now we do talk first about the disease in cases of bodily breakdown;

and that for an excellent reason. Because, though there may be doubt

about the way in which the body broke down, there is no doubt at all

about the shape in which it should be built up again. No doctor

proposes to produce a new kind of man, with a new arrangement of eyes

or limbs. The hospital, by necessity, may send a man home with one leg

less: but it will not (in a creative rapture) send him home with one

leg extra. Medical science is content with the normal human body, and

only seeks to restore it.

But social science is by no means always content with the normal human

soul; it has all sorts of fancy souls for sale. Man as a social

idealist will say "I am tired of being a Puritan; I want to be a

Pagan," or "Beyond this dark probation of Individualism I see the

shining paradise of Collectivism." Now in bodily ills there is none of

this difference about the ultimate ideal. The patient may or may not

want quinine; but he certainly wants health No one says "I am tired of

this headache; I want some toothache," or "The only thing for this

Russian influenza is a few German measles," or "Through this dark

probation of catarrh I see the shining paradise of rheumatism." But

exactly the whole difficulty in our public problems is that some men

are aiming at cures which other men would regard as worse maladies; are

offering ultimate conditions as states of health which others would

uncompromisingly call states of disease. Mr. Belloc once said that he

would no more part with the idea of property than with his teeth; yet

to Mr. Bernard Shaw property is not a tooth, but a toothache. Lord

Milner has sincerely attempted to introduce German efficiency; and many

of us would as soon welcome German measles. Dr. Saleeby would honestly

like to have Eugenics; but I would rather have rheumatics.

This is the arresting and dominant fact about modern social discussion;

that the quarrel is not merely about the difficulties, but about the

aim. We agree about the evil; it is about the good that we should tear

each other's eyes cut. We all admit that a lazy aristocracy is a bad

thing. We should not by any means all admit that an active aristocracy

would be a good thing. We all feel angry with an irreligious

priesthood; but some of us would go mad with disgust at a really

religious one. Everyone is indignant if our army is weak, including the

people who would be even more indignant if it were strong. The social

case is exactly the opposite of the medical case. We do not disagree,

like doctors, about the precise nature of the illness, while agreeing

about the nature of health. On the contrary, we all agree that England

is unhealthy, but half of us would not look at her in what the other

half would call blooming health . Public abuses are so prominent and

pestilent that they sweep all generous people into a sort of fictitious

unanimity. We forget that, while we agree about the abuses of things,

we should differ very much about the uses of them. Mr. Cadbury and I

would agree about the bad public house. It would be precisely in front

of the good public-house that our painful personal fracas would occur.

I maintain, therefore, that the common sociological method is quite

useless: that of first dissecting abject poverty or cataloguing

prostitution. We all dislike abject poverty; but it might be another

business if we began to discuss independent and dignified poverty. We

all disapprove of prostitution; but we do not all approve of purity.

The only way to discuss the social evil is to get at once to the social

ideal. We can all see the national madness; but what is national

sanity? I have called this book "What Is Wrong with the World?" and the

upshot of the title can be easily and clearly stated. What is wrong is

that we do not ask what is right.

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There is a popular philosophical joke intended to typify the endless

and useless arguments of philosophers; I mean the joke about which came

first, the chicken or the egg? I am not sure that properly understood,

it is so futile an inquiry after all. I am not concerned here to enter

on those deep metaphysical and theological differences of which the

chicken and egg debate is a frivolous, but a very felicitous, type. The

evolutionary materialists are appropriately enough represented in the

vision of all things coming from an egg, a dim and monstrous oval germ

that had laid itself by accident. That other supernatural school of

thought (to which I personally adhere) would be not unworthily typified

in the fancy that this round world of ours is but an egg brooded upon

by a sacred unbegotten bird; the mystic dove of the prophets. But it is

to much humbler functions that I here call the awful power of such a

distinction. Whether or no the living bird is at the beginning of our

mental chain, it is absolutely necessary that it should be at the end

of our mental chain. The bird is the thing to be aimed at--not with a

gun, but a life-bestowing wand. What is essential to our right thinking

is this: that the egg and the bird must not be thought of as equal

cosmic occurrences recurring alternatively forever. They must not

become a mere egg and bird pattern, like the egg and dart pattern. One

is a means and the other an end; they are in different mental worlds.

Leaving the complications of the human breakfast-table out of account,

in an elemental sense, the egg only exists to produce the chicken. But

the chicken does not exist only in order to produce another egg. He may

also exist to amuse himself, to praise God, and even to suggest ideas

to a French dramatist. Being a conscious life, he is, or may be,

valuable in himself. Now our modern politics are full of a noisy

forgetfulness; forgetfulness that the production of this happy and

conscious life is after all the aim of all complexities and

compromises. We talk of nothing but useful men and working

institutions; that is, we only think of the chickens as things that

will lay more eggs. Instead of seeking to breed our ideal bird, the

eagle of Zeus or the Swan of Avon, or whatever we happen to want, we

talk entirely in terms of the process and the embryo. The process

itself, divorced from its divine object, becomes doubtful and even

morbid; poison enters the embryo of everything; and our politics are

rotten eggs.

Idealism is only considering everything in its practical essence.

Idealism only means that we should consider a poker in reference to

poking before we discuss its suitability for wife-beating; that we

should ask if an egg is good enough for practical poultry-rearing

before we decide that the egg is bad enough for practical politics. But

I know that this primary pursuit of the theory (which is but pursuit of

the aim) exposes one to the cheap charge of fiddling while Rome is

burning. A school, of which Lord Rosebery is representative, has

endeavored to substitute for the moral or social ideals which have

hitherto been the motive of politics a general coherency or

completeness in the social system which has gained the nick-name of

"efficiency." I am not very certain of the secret doctrine of this sect

in the matter. But, as far as I can make out, "efficiency" means that

we ought to discover everything about a machine except what it is for.

There has arisen in our time a most singular fancy: the fancy that when

things go very wrong we need a practical man. It would be far truer to

say, that when things go very wrong we need an unpractical man.

Certainly, at least, we need a theorist. A practical man means a man

accustomed to mere daily practice, to the way things commonly work.

When things will not work, you must have the thinker, the man who has

some doctrine about why they work at all. It is wrong to fiddle while

Rome is burning; but it is quite right to study the theory of

hydraulics while Rome is burning.

It is then necessary to drop one's daily agnosticism and attempt rerum

cognoscere causas. If your aeroplane has a slight indisposition, a

handy man may mend it. But, if it is seriously ill, it is all the more

likely that some absent-minded old professor with wild white hair will

have to be dragged out of a college or laboratory to analyze the evil.

The more complicated the smash, the whiter-haired and more

absent-minded will be the theorist who is needed to deal with it; and

in some extreme cases, no one but the man (probably insane) who

invented your flying-ship could possibly say what was the matter with

it.

"Efficiency," of course, is futile for the same reason that strong men,

will-power and the superman are futile. That is, it is futile because

it only deals with actions after they have been performed. It has no

philosophy for incidents before they happen; therefore it has no power

of choice. An act can only be successful or unsuccessful when it is

over; if it is to begin, it must be, in the abstract, right or wrong.

There is no such thing as backing a winner; for he cannot be a winner

when he is backed. There is no such thing as fighting on the winning

side; one fights to find out which is the winning side. If any

operation has occurred, that operation was efficient. If a man is

murdered, the murder was efficient. A tropical sun is as efficient in

making people lazy as a Lancashire foreman bully in making them

energetic. Maeterlinck is as efficient in filling a man with strange

spiritual tremors as Messrs. Crosse and Blackwell are in filling a man

with jam. But it all depends on what you want to be filled with. Lord

Rosebery, being a modern skeptic, probably prefers the spiritual

tremors. I, being an orthodox Christian, prefer the jam. But both are

efficient when they have been effected; and inefficient until they are

effected. A man who thinks much about success must be the drowsiest

sentimentalist; for he must be always looking back. If he only likes

victory he must always come late for the battle. For the man of action

there is nothing but idealism.

This definite ideal is a far more urgent and practical matter in our

existing English trouble than any immediate plans or proposals. For the

present chaos is due to a sort of general oblivion of all that men were

originally aiming at. No man demands what he desires; each man demands

what he fancies he can get. Soon people forget what the man really

wanted first; and after a successful and vigorous political life, he

forgets it himself. The whole is an extravagant riot of second bests, a

pandemonium of pis-aller. Now this sort of pliability does not merely

prevent any heroic consistency, it also prevents any really practical

compromise. One can only find the middle distance between two points if

the two points will stand still. We may make an arrangement between two

litigants who cannot both get what they want; but not if they will not

even tell us what they want. The keeper of a restaurant would much

prefer that each customer should give his order smartly, though it were

for stewed ibis or boiled elephant, rather than that each customer

should sit holding his head in his hands, plunged in arithmetical

calculations about how much food there can be on the premises. Most of

us have suffered from a certain sort of ladies who, by their perverse

unselfishness, give more trouble than the selfish; who almost clamor

for the unpopular dish and scramble for the worst seat. Most of us have

known parties or expeditions full of this seething fuss of

self-effacement. From much meaner motives than those of such admirable

women, our practical politicians keep things in the same confusion

through the same doubt about their real demands. There is nothing that

so much prevents a settlement as a tangle of small surrenders. We are

bewildered on every side by politicians who are in favor of secular

education, but think it hopeless to work for it; who desire total

prohibition, but are certain they should not demand it; who regret

compulsory education, but resignedly continue it; or who want peasant

proprietorship and therefore vote for something else. It is this dazed

and floundering opportunism that gets in the way of everything. If our

statesmen were visionaries something practical might be done. If we ask

for something in the abstract we might get something in the concrete.

As it is, it is not only impossible to get what one wants, but it is

impossible to get any part of it, because nobody can mark it out

plainly like a map. That clear and even hard quality that there was in

the old bargaining has wholly vanished. We forget that the word

"compromise" contains, among other things, the rigid and ringing word

"promise." Moderation is not vague; it is as definite as perfection.

The middle point is as fixed as the extreme point.

If I am made to walk the plank by a pirate, it is vain for me to offer,

as a common-sense compromise, to walk along the plank for a reasonable

distance. It is exactly about the reasonable distance that the pirate

and I differ. There is an exquisite mathematical split second at which

the plank tips up. My common-sense ends just before that instant; the

pirate's common-sense begins just beyond it. But the point itself is as

hard as any geometrical diagram; as abstract as any theological dogma.

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But this new cloudy political cowardice has rendered useless the old

English compromise. People have begun to be terrified of an improvement

merely because it is complete. They call it utopian and revolutionary

that anyone should really have his own way, or anything be really done,

and done with. Compromise used to mean that half a loaf was better than

no bread. Among modern statesmen it really seems to mean that half a

loaf is better than a whole loaf.

As an instance to sharpen the argument, I take the one case of our

everlasting education bills. We have actually contrived to invent a new

kind of hypocrite. The old hypocrite, Tartuffe or Pecksniff, was a man

whose aims were really worldly and practical, while he pretended that

they were religious. The new hypocrite is one whose aims are really

religious, while he pretends that they are worldly and practical. The

Rev. Brown, the Wesleyan minister, sturdily declares that he cares

nothing for creeds, but only for education; meanwhile, in truth, the

wildest Wesleyanism is tearing his soul. The Rev. Smith, of the Church

of England, explains gracefully, with the Oxford manner, that the only

question for him is the prosperity and efficiency of the schools; while

in truth all the evil passions of a curate are roaring within him. It

is a fight of creeds masquerading as policies. I think these reverend

gentlemen do themselves wrong; I think they are more pious than they

will admit. Theology is not (as some suppose) expunged as an error. It

is merely concealed, like a sin. Dr. Clifford really wants a

theological atmosphere as much as Lord Halifax; only it is a different

one. If Dr. Clifford would ask plainly for Puritanism and Lord Halifax

ask plainly for Catholicism, something might be done for them. We are

all, one hopes, imaginative enough to recognize the dignity and

distinctness of another religion, like Islam or the cult of Apollo. I

am quite ready to respect another man's faith; but it is too much to

ask that I should respect his doubt, his worldly hesitations and

fictions, his political bargain and make-believe. Most Nonconformists

with an instinct for English history could see something poetic and

national about the Archbishop of Canterbury as an Archbishop of

Canterbury. It is when he does the rational British statesman that they

very justifiably get annoyed. Most Anglicans with an eye for pluck and

simplicity could admire Dr. Clifford as a Baptist minister. It is when

he says that he is simply a citizen that nobody can possibly believe

him.

But indeed the case is yet more curious than this. The one argument

that used to be urged for our creedless vagueness was that at least it

saved us from fanaticism. But it does not even do that. On the

contrary, it creates and renews fanaticism with a force quite peculiar

to itself. This is at once so strange and so true that I will ask the

reader's attention to it with a little more precision.

Some people do not like the word "dogma." Fortunately they are free,

and there is an alternative for them. There are two things, and two

things only, for the human mind, a dogma and a prejudice. The Middle

Ages were a rational epoch, an age of doctrine. Our age is, at its

best, a poetical epoch, an age of prejudice. A doctrine is a definite

point; a prejudice is a direction. That an ox may be eaten, while a man

should not be eaten, is a doctrine. That as little as possible of

anything should be eaten is a prejudice; which is also sometimes called

an ideal. Now a direction is always far more fantastic than a plan. I

would rather have the most archaic map of the road to Brighton than a

general recommendation to turn to the left. Straight lines that are not

parallel must meet at last; but curves may recoil forever. A pair of

lovers might walk along the frontier of France and Germany, one on the

one side and one on the other, so long as they were not vaguely told to

keep away from each other. And this is a strictly true parable of the

effect of our modern vagueness in losing and separating men as in a

mist.

It is not merely true that a creed unites men. Nay, a difference of

creed unites men--so long as it is a clear difference. A boundary

unites. Many a magnanimous Moslem and chivalrous Crusader must have

been nearer to each other, because they were both dogmatists, than any

two homeless agnostics in a pew of Mr. Campbell's chapel. "I say God is

One," and "I say God is One but also Three," that is the beginning of a

good quarrelsome, manly friendship. But our age would turn these creeds

into tendencies. It would tell the Trinitarian to follow multiplicity

as such (because it was his "temperament"), and he would turn up later

with three hundred and thirty-three persons in the Trinity. Meanwhile,

it would turn the Moslem into a Monist: a frightful intellectual fall.

It would force that previously healthy person not only to admit that

there was one God, but to admit that there was nobody else. When each

had, for a long enough period, followed the gleam of his own nose (like

the Dong) they would appear again; the Christian a Polytheist, and the

Moslem a Panegoist, both quite mad, and far more unfit to understand

each other than before.

It is exactly the same with politics. Our political vagueness divides

men, it does not fuse them. Men will walk along the edge of a chasm in

clear weather, but they will edge miles away from it in a fog. So a

Tory can walk up to the very edge of Socialism, if he knows what is

Socialism. But if he is told that Socialism is a spirit, a sublime

atmosphere, a noble, indefinable tendency, why, then he keeps out of

its way; and quite right too. One can meet an assertion with argument;

but healthy bigotry is the only way in which one can meet a tendency. I

am told that the Japanese method of wrestling consists not of suddenly

pressing, but of suddenly giving way. This is one of my many reasons

for disliking the Japanese civilization. To use surrender as a weapon

is the very worst spirit of the East. But certainly there is no force

so hard to fight as the force which it is easy to conquer; the force

that always yields and then returns. Such is the force of a great

impersonal prejudice, such as possesses the modern world on so many

points. Against this there is no weapon at all except a rigid and

steely sanity, a resolution not to listen to fads, and not to be

infected by diseases.

In short, the rational human faith must armor itself with prejudice in

an age of prejudices, just as it armoured itself with logic in an age

of logic. But the difference between the two mental methods is marked

and unmistakable. The essential of the difference is this: that

prejudices are divergent, whereas creeds are always in collision.

Believers bump into each other; whereas bigots keep out of each other's

way. A creed is a collective thing, and even its sins are sociable. A

prejudice is a private thing, and even its tolerance is misanthropic.

So it is with our existing divisions. They keep out of each other's

way; the Tory paper and the Radical paper do not answer each other;

they ignore each other. Genuine controversy, fair cut and thrust before

a common audience, has become in our special epoch very rare. For the

sincere controversialist is above all things a good listener. The

really burning enthusiast never interrupts; he listens to the enemy's

arguments as eagerly as a spy would listen to the enemy's arrangements.

But if you attempt an actual argument with a modern paper of opposite

politics, you will find that no medium is admitted between violence and

evasion. You will have no answer except slanging or silence. A modern

editor must not have that eager ear that goes with the honest tongue.

He may be deaf and silent; and that is called dignity. Or he may be

deaf and noisy; and that is called slashing journalism. In neither case

is there any controversy; for the whole object of modern party

combatants is to charge out of earshot.

The only logical cure for all this is the assertion of a human ideal.

In dealing with this, I will try to be as little transcendental as is

consistent with reason; it is enough to say that unless we have some

doctrine of a divine man, all abuses may be excused, since evolution

may turn them into uses. It will be easy for the scientific plutocrat

to maintain that humanity will adapt itself to any conditions which we

now consider evil. The old tyrants invoked the past; the new tyrants

will invoke the future evolution has produced the snail and the owl;

evolution can produce a workman who wants no more space than a snail,

and no more light than an owl. The employer need not mind sending a

Kaffir to work underground; he will soon become an underground animal,

like a mole. He need not mind sending a diver to hold his breath in the

deep seas; he will soon be a deep-sea animal. Men need not trouble to

alter conditions, conditions will so soon alter men. The head can be

beaten small enough to fit the hat. Do not knock the fetters off the

slave; knock the slave until he forgets the fetters. To all this

plausible modem argument for oppression, the only adequate answer is,

that there is a permanent human ideal that must not be either confused

or destroyed. The most important man on earth is the perfect man who is

not there. The Christian religion has specially uttered the ultimate

sanity of Man, says Scripture, who shall judge the incarnate and human

truth. Our lives and laws are not judged by divine superiority, but

simply by human perfection. It is man, says Aristotle, who is the

measure. It is the Son of Man, says Scripture, who shall judge the

quick and the dead.

Doctrine, therefore, does not cause dissensions; rather a doctrine

alone can cure our dissensions. It is necessary to ask, however,

roughly, what abstract and ideal shape in state or family would fulfil

the human hunger; and this apart from whether we can completely obtain

it or not. But when we come to ask what is the need of normal men, what

is the desire of all nations, what is the ideal house, or road, or

rule, or republic, or king, or priesthood, then we are confronted with

a strange and irritating difficulty peculiar to the present time; and

we must call a temporary halt and examine that obstacle.

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The last few decades have been marked by a special cultivation of the

romance of the future. We seem to have made up our minds to

misunderstand what has happened; and we turn, with a sort of relief, to

stating what will happen--which is (apparently) much easier. The modern

man no longer presents the memoirs of his great grandfather; but is

engaged in writing a detailed and authoritative biography of his

great-grandson. Instead of trembling before the specters of the dead,

we shudder abjectly under the shadow of the babe unborn. This spirit is

apparent everywhere, even to the creation of a form of futurist

romance. Sir Walter Scott stands at the dawn of the nineteenth century

for the novel of the past; Mr. H. G. Wells stands at the dawn of the

twentieth century for the novel of the future. The old story, we know,

was supposed to begin: "Late on a winter's evening two horsemen might

have been seen--." The new story has to begin: "Late on a winter's

evening two aviators will be seen--." The movement is not without its

elements of charm; there is something spirited, if eccentric, in the

sight of so many people fighting over again the fights that have not

yet happened; of people still glowing with the memory of tomorrow

morning. A man in advance of the age is a familiar phrase enough. An

age in advance of the age is really rather odd.

But when full allowance has been made for this harmless element of

poetry and pretty human perversity in the thing, I shall not hesitate

to maintain here that this cult of the future is not only a weakness

but a cowardice of the age. It is the peculiar evil of this epoch that

even its pugnacity is fundamentally frightened; and the Jingo is

contemptible not because he is impudent, but because he is timid. The

reason why modern armaments do not inflame the imagination like the

arms and emblazonments of the Crusades is a reason quite apart from

optical ugliness or beauty. Some battleships are as beautiful as the

sea; and many Norman nosepieces were as ugly as Norman noses. The

atmospheric ugliness that surrounds our scientific war is an emanation

from that evil panic which is at the heart of it. The charge of the

Crusades was a charge; it was charging towards God, the wild

consolation of the braver. The charge of the modern armaments is not a

charge at all. It is a rout, a retreat, a flight from the devil, who

will catch the hindmost. It is impossible to imagine a mediaeval knight

talking of longer and longer French lances, with precisely the

quivering employed about larger and larger German ships The man who

called the Blue Water School the "Blue Funk School" uttered a

psychological truth which that school itself would scarcely essentially

deny. Even the two-power standard, if it be a necessity, is in a sense

a degrading necessity. Nothing has more alienated many magnanimous

minds from Imperial enterprises than the fact that they are always

exhibited as stealthy or sudden defenses against a world of cold

rapacity and fear. The Boer War, for instance, was colored not so much

by the creed that we were doing something right, as by the creed that

Boers and Germans were probably doing something wrong; driving us (as

it was said) to the sea. Mr. Chamberlain, I think, said that the war

was a feather in his cap and so it was: a white feather.

Now this same primary panic that I feel in our rush towards patriotic

armaments I feel also in our rush towards future visions of society.

The modern mind is forced towards the future by a certain sense of

fatigue, not unmixed with terror, with which it regards the past. It is

propelled towards the coming time; it is, in the exact words of the

popular phrase, knocked into the middle of next week. And the goad

which drives it on thus eagerly is not an affectation for futurity

Futurity does not exist, because it is still future. Rather it is a

fear of the past; a fear not merely of the evil in the past, but of the

good in the past also. The brain breaks down under the unbearable

virtue of mankind. There have been so many flaming faiths that we

cannot hold; so many harsh heroisms that we cannot imitate; so many

great efforts of monumental building or of military glory which seem to

us at once sublime and pathetic. The future is a refuge from the fierce

competition of our forefathers. The older generation, not the younger,

is knocking at our door. It is agreeable to escape, as Henley said,

into the Street of By-and-Bye, where stands the Hostelry of Never. It

is pleasant to play with children, especially unborn children. The

future is a blank wall on which every man can write his own name as

large as he likes; the past I find already covered with illegible

scribbles, such as Plato, Isaiah, Shakespeare, Michael Angelo,

Napoleon. I can make the future as narrow as myself; the past is

obliged to be as broad and turbulent as humanity. And the upshot of

this modern attitude is really this: that men invent new ideals because

they dare not attempt old ideals. They look forward with enthusiasm,

because they are afraid to look back.

Now in history there is no Revolution that is not a Restoration. Among

the many things that Leave me doubtful about the modern habit of fixing

eyes on the future, none is stronger than this: that all the men in

history who have really done anything with the future have had their

eyes fixed upon the past. I need not mention the Renaissance, the very

word proves my case. The originality of Michael Angelo and Shakespeare

began with the digging up of old vases and manuscripts. The mildness of

poets absolutely arose out of the mildness of antiquaries. So the great

mediaeval revival was a memory of the Roman Empire. So the Reformation

looked back to the Bible and Bible times. So the modern Catholic

movement has looked back to patristic times. But that modern movement

which many would count the most anarchic of all is in this sense the

most conservative of all. Never was the past more venerated by men than

it was by the French Revolutionists. They invoked the little republics

of antiquity with the complete confidence of one who invokes the gods.

The Sans-culottes believed (as their name might imply) in a return to

simplicity. They believed most piously in a remote past; some might

call it a mythical past. For some strange reason man must always thus

plant his fruit trees in a graveyard. Man can only find life among the

dead. Man is a misshapen monster, with his feet set forward and his

face turned back. He can make the future luxuriant and gigantic, so

long as he is thinking about the past. When he tries to think about the

future itself, his mind diminishes to a pin point with imbecility,

which some call Nirvana. To-morrow is the Gorgon; a man must only see

it mirrored in the shining shield of yesterday. If he sees it directly

he is turned to stone. This has been the fate of all those who have

really seen fate and futurity as clear and inevitable. The Calvinists,

with their perfect creed of predestination, were turned to stone. The

modern sociological scientists (with their excruciating Eugenics) are

turned to stone. The only difference is that the Puritans make

dignified, and the Eugenists somewhat amusing, statues.

But there is one feature in the past which more than all the rest

defies and depresses the moderns and drives them towards this

featureless future. I mean the presence in the past of huge ideals,

unfulfilled and sometimes abandoned. The sight of these splendid

failures is melancholy to a restless and rather morbid generation; and

they maintain a strange silence about them--sometimes amounting to an

unscrupulous silence. They keep them entirely out of their newspapers

and almost entirely out of their history books. For example, they will

often tell you (in their praises of the coming age) that we are moving

on towards a United States of Europe. But they carefully omit to tell

you that we are moving away from a United States of Europe, that such a

thing existed literally in Roman and essentially in mediaeval times.

They never admit that the international hatreds (which they call

barbaric) are really very recent, the mere breakdown of the ideal of

the Holy Roman Empire. Or again, they will tell you that there is going

to be a social revolution, a great rising of the poor against the rich;

but they never rub it in that France made that magnificent attempt,

unaided, and that we and all the world allowed it to be trampled out

and forgotten. I say decisively that nothing is so marked in modern

writing as the prediction of such ideals in the future combined with

the ignoring of them in the past. Anyone can test this for himself.

Read any thirty or forty pages of pamphlets advocating peace in Europe

and see how many of them praise the old Popes or Emperors for keeping

the peace in Europe. Read any armful of essays and poems in praise of

social democracy, and see how many of them praise the old Jacobins who

created democracy and died for it. These colossal ruins are to the

modern only enormous eyesores. He looks back along the valley of the

past and sees a perspective of splendid but unfinished cities. They are

unfinished, not always through enmity or accident, but often through

fickleness, mental fatigue, and the lust for alien philosophies. We

have not only left undone those things that we ought to have done, but

we have even left undone those things that we wanted to do

It is very currently suggested that the modern man is the heir of all

the ages, that he has got the good out of these successive human

experiments. I know not what to say in answer to this, except to ask

the reader to look at the modern man, as I have just looked at the

modern man-- in the looking-glass. Is it really true that you and I are

two starry towers built up of all the most towering visions of the

past? Have we really fulfilled all the great historic ideals one after

the other, from our naked ancestor who was brave enough to till a

mammoth with a stone knife, through the Greek citizen and the Christian

saint to our own grandfather or great-grandfather, who may have been

sabred by the Manchester Yeomanry or shot in the '48? Are we still

strong enough to spear mammoths, but now tender enough to spare them?

Does the cosmos contain any mammoth that we have either speared or

spared? When we decline (in a marked manner) to fly the red flag and

fire across a barricade like our grandfathers, are we really declining

in deference to sociologists--or to soldiers? Have we indeed

outstripped the warrior and passed the ascetical saint? I fear we only

outstrip the warrior in the sense that we should probably run away from

him. And if we have passed the saint, I fear we have passed him without

bowing.

This is, first and foremost, what I mean by the narrowness of the new

ideas, the limiting effect of the future. Our modern prophetic idealism

is narrow because it has undergone a persistent process of elimination.

We must ask for new things because we are not allowed to ask for old

things. The whole position is based on this idea that we have got all

the good that can be got out of the ideas of the past. But we have not

got all the good out of them, perhaps at this moment not any of the

good out of them. And the need here is a need of complete freedom for

restoration as well as revolution.

We often read nowadays of the valor or audacity with which some rebel

attacks a hoary tyranny or an antiquated superstition. There is not

really any courage at all in attacking hoary or antiquated things, any

more than in offering to fight one's grandmother. The really courageous

man is he who defies tyrannies young as the morning and superstitions

fresh as the first flowers. The only true free-thinker is he whose

intellect is as much free from the future as from the past. He cares as

little for what will be as for what has been; he cares only for what

ought to be. And for my present purpose I specially insist on this

abstract independence. If I am to discuss what is wrong, one of the

first things that are wrong is this: the deep and silent modern

assumption that past things have become impossible. There is one

metaphor of which the moderns are very fond; they are always saying,

"You can't put the clock back." The simple and obvious answer is "You

can." A clock, being a piece of human construction, can be restored by

the human finger to any figure or hour. In the same way society, being

a piece of human construction, can be reconstructed upon any plan that

has ever existed.

There is another proverb, "As you have made your bed, so you must lie

on it"; which again is simply a lie. If I have made my bed

uncomfortable, please God I will make it again. We could restore the

Heptarchy or the stage coaches if we chose. It might take some time to

do, and it might be very inadvisable to do it; but certainly it is not

impossible as bringing back last Friday is impossible. This is, as I

say, the first freedom that I claim: the freedom to restore. I claim a

right to propose as a solution the old patriarchal system of a Highland

clan, if that should seem to eliminate the largest number of evils. It

certainly would eliminate some evils; for instance, the unnatural sense

of obeying cold and harsh strangers, mere bureaucrats and policemen. I

claim the right to propose the complete independence of the small Greek

or Italian towns, a sovereign city of Brixton or Brompton, if that

seems the best way out of our troubles. It would be a way out of some

of our troubles; we could not have in a small state, for instance,

those enormous illusions about men or measures which are nourished by

the great national or international newspapers. You could not persuade

a city state that Mr. Beit was an Englishman, or Mr. Dillon a

desperado, any more than you could persuade a Hampshire Village that

the village drunkard was a teetotaller or the village idiot a

statesman. Nevertheless, I do not as a fact propose that the Browns and

the Smiths should be collected under separate tartans. Nor do I even

propose that Clapham should declare its independence. I merely declare

my independence. I merely claim my choice of all the tools in the

universe; and I shall not admit that any of them are blunted merely

because they have been used.

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The task of modern idealists indeed is made much too easy for them by

the fact that they are always taught that if a thing has been defeated

it has been disproved. Logically, the case is quite clearly the other

way. The lost causes are exactly those which might have saved the

world. If a man says that the Young Pretender would have made England

happy, it is hard to answer him. If anyone says that the Georges made

England happy, I hope we all know what to answer. That which was

prevented is always impregnable; and the only perfect King of England

was he who was smothered. Exactly be cause Jacobitism failed we cannot

call it a failure. Precisely because the Commune collapsed as a

rebellion we cannot say that it collapsed as a system. But such

outbursts were brief or incidental. Few people realize how many of the

largest efforts, the facts that will fill history, were frustrated in

their full design and come down to us as gigantic cripples. I have only

space to allude to the two largest facts of modern history: the

Catholic Church and that modern growth rooted in the French Revolution.

When four knights scattered the blood and brains of St. Thomas of

Canterbury, it was not only a sign of anger but of a sort of black

admiration. They wished for his blood, but they wished even more for

his brains. Such a blow will remain forever unintelligible unless we

realise what the brains of St. Thomas were thinking about just before

they were distributed over the floor. They were thinking about the

great mediaeval conception that the church is the judge of the world.

Becket objected to a priest being tried even by the Lord Chief Justice.

And his reason was simple: because the Lord Chief Justice was being

tried by the priest. The judiciary was itself sub judice. The kings

were themselves in the dock. The idea was to create an invisible

kingdom, without armies or prisons, but with complete freedom to

condemn publicly all the kingdoms of the earth. Whether such a supreme

church would have cured society we cannot affirm definitely; because

the church never was a supreme church. We only know that in England at

any rate the princes conquered the saints. What the world wanted we see

before us; and some of us call it a failure. But we cannot call what

the church wanted a failure, simply because the church failed. Tracy

struck a little too soon. England had not yet made the great Protestant

discovery that the king can do no wrong. The king was whipped in the

cathedral; a performance which I recommend to those who regret the

unpopularity of church-going. But the discovery was made; and Henry

VIII scattered Becket's bones as easily as Tracy had scattered his

brains.

Of course, I mean that Catholicism was not tried; plenty of Catholics

were tried, and found guilty. My point is that the world did not tire

of the church's ideal, but of its reality. Monasteries were impugned

not for the chastity of monks, but for the unchastity of monks.

Christianity was unpopular not because of the humility, but of the

arrogance of Christians. Certainly, if the church failed it was largely

through the churchmen. But at the same time hostile elements had

certainly begun to end it long before it could have done its work. In

the nature of things it needed a common scheme of life and thought in

Europe. Yet the mediaeval system began to be broken to pieces

intellectually, long before it showed the slightest hint of falling to

pieces morally. The huge early heresies, like the Albigenses, had not

the faintest excuse in moral superiority. And it is actually true that

the Reformation began to tear Europe apart before the Catholic Church

had had time to pull it together. The Prussians, for instance, were not

converted to Christianity at all until quite close to the Reformation.

The poor creatures hardly had time to become Catholics before they were

told to become Protestants. This explains a great deal of their

subsequent conduct. But I have only taken this as the first and most

evident case of the general truth: that the great ideals of the past

failed not by being outlived (which must mean over-lived), but by not

being lived enough. Mankind has not passed through the Middle Ages.

Rather mankind has retreated from the Middle Ages in reaction and rout.

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been

found difficult; and left untried.

It is, of course, the same in the case of the French Revolution. A

great part of our present perplexity arises from the fact that the

French Revolution has half succeeded and half failed. In one sense,

Valmy was the decisive battle of the West, and in another Trafalgar. We

have, indeed, destroyed the largest territorial tyrannies, and created

a free peasantry in almost all Christian countries except England; of

which we shall say more anon. But representative government, the one

universal relic, is a very poor fragment of the full republican idea.

The theory of the French Revolution presupposed two things in

government, things which it achieved at the time, but which it has

certainly not bequeathed to its imitators in England, Germany, and

America. The first of these was the idea of honorable poverty; that a

statesman must be something of a stoic; the second was the idea of

extreme publicity. Many imaginative English writers, including Carlyle,

seem quite unable to imagine how it was that men like Robespierre and

Marat were ardently admired. The best answer is that they were admired

for being poor-- poor when they might have been rich.

No one will pretend that this ideal exists at all in the haute

politique of this country. Our national claim to political

incorruptibility is actually based on exactly the opposite argument; it

is based on the theory that wealthy men in assured positions will have

no temptation to financial trickery. Whether the history of the English

aristocracy, from the spoliation of the monasteries to the annexation

of the mines, entirely supports this theory I am not now inquiring; but

certainly it is our theory, that wealth will be a protection against

political corruption. The English statesman is bribed not to be bribed.

He is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, so that he may never

afterwards be found with the silver spoons in his pocket. So strong is

our faith in this protection by plutocracy, that we are more and more

trusting our empire in the hands of families which inherit wealth

without either blood or manners. Some of our political houses are

parvenue by pedigree; they hand on vulgarity like a coat of-arms. In

the case of many a modern statesman to say that he is born with a

silver spoon in his mouth, is at once inadequate and excessive. He is

born with a silver knife in his mouth. But all this only illustrates

the English theory that poverty is perilous for a politician.

It will be the same if we compare the conditions that have come about

with the Revolution legend touching publicity. The old democratic

doctrine was that the more light that was let in to all departments of

State, the easier it was for a righteous indignation to move promptly

against wrong. In other words, monarchs were to live in glass houses,

that mobs might throw stones. Again, no admirer of existing English

politics (if there is any admirer of existing English politics) will

really pretend that this ideal of publicity is exhausted, or even

attempted. Obviously public life grows more private every day. The

French have, indeed, continued the tradition of revealing secrets and

making scandals; hence they are more flagrant and palpable than we, not

in sin but in the confession of sin. The first trial of Dreyfus might

have happened in England; it is exactly the second trial that would

have been legally impossible. But, indeed, if we wish to realise how

far we fall short of the original republican outline, the sharpest way

to test it is to note how far we fall short even of the republican

element in the older regime. Not only are we less democratic than

Danton and Condorcet, but we are in many ways less democratic than

Choiseul and Marie Antoinette. The richest nobles before the revolt

were needy middle-class people compared with our Rothschilds and

Roseberys. And in the matter of publicity the old French monarchy was

infinitely more democratic than any of the monarchies of today.

Practically anybody who chose could walk into the palace and see the

king playing with his children, or paring his nails. The people

possessed the monarch,, as the people possess Primrose Hill; that is,

they cannot move it, but they can sprawl all over it. The old French

monarchy was founded on the excellent principle that a cat may look at

a king. But nowadays a cat may not look at a king; unless it is a very

tame cat. Even where the press is free for criticism it is only used

for adulation. The substantial difference comes to something uncommonly

like this: Eighteenth century tyranny meant that you could say "The K\_\_

of Br\_\_rd is a profligate." Twentieth century liberty really means that

you are allowed to say "The King of Brentford is a model family man."

But we have delayed the main argument too long for the parenthetical

purpose of showing that the great democratic dream, like the great

mediaeval dream, has in a strict and practical sense been a dream

unfulfilled. Whatever is the matter with modern England it is not that

we have carried out too literally, or achieved with disappointing

completeness, either the Catholicism of Becket or the equality of

Marat. Now I have taken these two cases merely because they are typical

of ten thousand other cases; the world is full of these unfulfilled

ideas, these uncompleted temples. History does not consist of completed

and crumbling ruins; rather it consists of half-built villas abandoned

by a bankrupt-builder. This world is more like an unfinished suburb

than a deserted cemetery.

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But it is for this especial reason that such an explanation is

necessary on the very threshold of the definition of ideals. For owing

to that historic fallacy with which I have just dealt, numbers of

readers will expect me, when I propound an ideal, to propound a new

ideal. Now I have no notion at all of propounding a new ideal. There is

no new ideal imaginable by the madness of modern sophists, which will

be anything like so startling as fulfilling any one of the old ones. On

the day that any copybook maxim is carried out there will be something

like an earthquake on the earth. There is only one thing new that can

be done under the sun; and that is to look at the sun. If you attempt

it on a blue day in June, you will know why men do not look straight at

their ideals. There is only one really startling thing to be done with

the ideal, and that is to do it. It is to face the flaming logical

fact, and its frightful consequences. Christ knew that it would be a

more stunning thunderbolt to fulfil the law than to destroy it. It is

true of both the cases I have quoted, and of every case. The pagans had

always adored purity: Athena, Artemis, Vesta. It was when the virgin

martyrs began defiantly to practice purity that they rent them with

wild beasts, and rolled them on red-hot coals. The world had always

loved the notion of the poor man uppermost; it can be proved by every

legend from Cinderella to Whittington, by every poem from the

Magnificat to the Marseillaise. The kings went mad against France not

because she idealized this ideal, but because she realized it. Joseph

of Austria and Catherine of Russia quite agreed that the people should

rule; what horrified them was that the people did. The French

Revolution, therefore, is the type of all true revolutions, because its

ideal is as old as the Old Adam, but its fulfilment almost as fresh, as

miraculous, and as new as the New Jerusalem.

But in the modern world we are primarily confronted with the

extraordinary spectacle of people turning to new ideals because they

have not tried the old. Men have not got tired of Christianity; they

have never found enough Christianity to get tired of. Men have never

wearied of political justice; they have wearied of waiting for it.

Now, for the purpose of this book, I propose to take only one of these

old ideals; but one that is perhaps the oldest. I take the principle of

domesticity: the ideal house; the happy family, the holy family of

history. For the moment it is only necessary to remark that it is like

the church and like the republic, now chiefly assailed by those who

have never known it, or by those who have failed to fulfil it.

Numberless modern women have rebelled against domesticity in theory

because they have never known it in practice. Hosts of the poor are

driven to the workhouse without ever having known the house. Generally

speaking, the cultured class is shrieking to be let out of the decent

home, just as the working class is shouting to be let into it.

Now if we take this house or home as a test, we may very generally lay

the simple spiritual foundations or the idea. God is that which can

make something out of nothing. Man (it may truly be said) is that which

can make something out of anything. In other words, while the joy of

God be unlimited creation, the special joy of man is limited creation,

the combination of creation with limits. Man's pleasure, therefore, is

to possess conditions, but also to be partly possessed by them; to be

half-controlled by the flute he plays or by the field he digs. The

excitement is to get the utmost out of given conditions; the conditions

will stretch, but not indefinitely. A man can write an immortal sonnet

on an old envelope, or hack a hero out of a lump of rock. But hacking a

sonnet out of a rock would be a laborious business, and making a hero

out of an envelope is almost out of the sphere of practical politics.

This fruitful strife with limitations, when it concerns some airy

entertainment of an educated class, goes by the name of Art. But the

mass of men have neither time nor aptitude for the invention of

invisible or abstract beauty. For the mass of men the idea of artistic

creation can only be expressed by an idea unpopular in present

discussions--the idea of property. The average man cannot cut clay into

the shape of a man; but he can cut earth into the shape of a garden;

and though he arranges it with red geraniums and blue potatoes in

alternate straight lines, he is still an artist; because he has chosen.

The average man cannot paint the sunset whose colors be admires; but he

can paint his own house with what color he chooses, and though he

paints it pea green with pink spots, he is still an artist; because

that is his choice. Property is merely the art of the democracy. It

means that every man should have something that he can shape in his own

image, as he is shaped in the image of heaven. But because he is not

God, but only a graven image of God, his self-expression must deal with

limits; properly with limits that are strict and even small.

I am well aware that the word "property" has been defied in our time by

the corruption of the great capitalists. One would think, to hear

people talk, that the Rothchilds and the Rockefellers were on the side

of property. But obviously they are the enemies of property; because

they are enemies of their own limitations. They do not want their own

land; but other people's. When they remove their neighbor's landmark,

they also remove their own. A man who loves a little triangular field

ought to love it because it is triangular; anyone who destroys the

shape, by giving him more land, is a thief who has stolen a triangle. A

man with the true poetry of possession wishes to see the wall where his

garden meets Smith's garden; the hedge where his farm touches Brown's.

He cannot see the shape of his own land unless he sees the edges of his

neighbor's. It is the negation of property that the Duke of Sutherland

should have all the farms in one estate; just as it would be the

negation of marriage if he had all our wives in one harem.

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As I have said, I propose to take only one central instance; I will

take the institution called the private house or home; the shell and

organ of the family. We will consider cosmic and political tendencies

simply as they strike that ancient and unique roof. Very few words will

suffice for all I have to say about the family itself. I leave alone

the speculations about its animal origin and the details of its social

reconstruction; I am concerned only with its palpable omnipresence. It

is a necessity far mankind; it is (if you like to put it so) a trap for

mankind. Only by the hypocritical ignoring of a huge fact can any one

contrive to talk of "free love"; as if love were an episode like

lighting a cigarette, or whistling a tune. Suppose whenever a man lit a

cigarette, a towering genie arose from the rings of smoke and followed

him everywhere as a huge slave. Suppose whenever a man whistled a tune

he "drew an angel down" and had to walk about forever with a seraph on

a string. These catastrophic images are but faint parallels to the

earthquake consequences that Nature has attached to sex; and it is

perfectly plain at the beginning that a man cannot be a free lover; he

is either a traitor or a tied man. The second element that creates the

family is that its consequences, though colossal, are gradual; the

cigarette produces a baby giant, the song only an infant seraph. Thence

arises the necessity for some prolonged system of co-operation; and

thence arises the family in its full educational sense.

It may be said that this institution of the home is the one anarchist

institution. That is to say, it is older than law, and stands outside

the State. By its nature it is refreshed or corrupted by indefinable

forces of custom or kinship. This is not to be understood as meaning

that the State has no authority over families; that State authority is

invoked and ought to be invoked in many abnormal cases. But in most

normal cases of family joys and sorrows, the State has no mode of

entry. It is not so much that the law should not interfere, as that the

law cannot. Just as there are fields too far off for law, so there are

fields too near; as a man may see the North Pole before he sees his own

backbone. Small and near matters escape control at least as much as

vast and remote ones; and the real pains and pleasures of the family

form a strong instance of this. If a baby cries for the moon, the

policeman cannot procure the moon--but neither can he stop the baby.

Creatures so close to each other as husband and wife, or a mother and

children, have powers of making each other happy or miserable with

which no public coercion can deal. If a marriage could be dissolved

every morning it would not give back his night's rest to a man kept

awake by a curtain lecture; and what is the good of giving a man a lot

of power where he only wants a little peace? The child must depend on

the most imperfect mother; the mother may be devoted to the most

unworthy children; in such relations legal revenges are vain. Even in

the abnormal cases where the law may operate, this difficulty is

constantly found; as many a bewildered magistrate knows. He has to save

children from starvation by taking away their breadwinner. And he often

has to break a wife's heart because her husband has already broken her

head. The State has no tool delicate enough to deracinate the rooted

habits and tangled affections of the family; the two sexes, whether

happy or unhappy, are glued together too tightly for us to get the

blade of a legal penknife in between them. The man and the woman are

one flesh--yes, even when they are not one spirit. Man is a quadruped.

Upon this ancient and anarchic intimacy, types of government have

little or no effect; it is happy or unhappy, by its own sexual

wholesomeness and genial habit, under the republic of Switzerland or

the despotism of Siam. Even a republic in Siam would not have done much

towards freeing the Siamese Twins.

The problem is not in marriage, but in sex; and would be felt under the

freest concubinage. Nevertheless, the overwhelming mass of mankind has

not believed in freedom in this matter, but rather in a more or less

lasting tie. Tribes and civilizations differ about the occasions on

which we may loosen the bond, but they all agree that there is a bond

to be loosened, not a mere universal detachment. For the purposes of

this book I am not concerned to discuss that mystical view of marriage

in which I myself believe: the great European tradition which has made

marriage a sacrament. It is enough to say here that heathen and

Christian alike have regarded marriage as a tie; a thing not normally

to be sundered. Briefly, this human belief in a sexual bond rests on a

principle of which the modern mind has made a very inadequate study. It

is, perhaps, most nearly paralleled by the principle of the second wind

in walking.

The principle is this: that in everything worth having, even in every

pleasure, there is a point of pain or tedium that must be survived, so

that the pleasure may revive and endure. The joy of battle comes after

the first fear of death; the joy of reading Virgil comes after the bore

of learning him; the glow of the sea-bather comes after the icy shock

of the sea bath; and the success of the marriage comes after the

failure of the honeymoon. All human vows, laws, and contracts are so

many ways of surviving with success this breaking point, this instant

of potential surrender.

In everything on this earth that is worth doing, there is a stage when

no one would do it, except for necessity or honor. It is then that the

Institution upholds a man and helps him on to the firmer ground ahead.

Whether this solid fact of human nature is sufficient to justify the

sublime dedication of Christian marriage is quite an other matter, it

is amply sufficient to justify the general human feeling of marriage as

a fixed thing, dissolution of which is a fault or, at least, an

ignominy. The essential element is not so much duration as security.

Two people must be tied together in order to do themselves justice; for

twenty minutes at a dance, or for twenty years in a marriage In both

cases the point is, that if a man is bored in the first five minutes he

must go on and force himself to be happy. Coercion is a kind of

encouragement; and anarchy (or what some call liberty) is essentially

oppressive, because it is essentially discouraging. If we all floated

in the air like bubbles, free to drift anywhere at any instant, the

practical result would be that no one would have the courage to begin a

conversation. It would be so embarrassing to start a sentence in a

friendly whisper, and then have to shout the last half of it because

the other party was floating away into the free and formless ether The

two must hold each other to do justice to each other. If Americans can

be divorced for "incompatibility of temper" I cannot conceive why they

are not all divorced. I have known many happy marriages, but never a

compatible one. The whole aim of marriage is to fight through and

survive the instant when incompatibility becomes unquestionable. For a

man and a woman, as such, are incompatible.

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In the course of this crude study we shall have to touch on what is

called the problem of poverty, especially the dehumanized poverty of

modern industrialism. But in this primary matter of the ideal the

difficulty is not the problem of poverty, but the problem of wealth. It

is the special psychology of leisure and luxury that falsifies life.

Some experience of modern movements of the sort called "advanced" has

led me to the conviction that they generally repose upon some

experience peculiar to the rich. It is so with that fallacy of free

love of which I have already spoken; the idea of sexuality as a string

of episodes. That implies a long holiday in which to get tired of one

woman, and a motor car in which to wander looking for others; it also

implies money for maintenances. An omnibus conductor has hardly time to

love his own wife, let alone other people's. And the success with which

nuptial estrangements are depicted in modern "problem plays" is due to

the fact that there is only one thing that a drama cannot depict--that

is a hard day's work. I could give many other instances of this

plutocratic assumption behind progressive fads. For instance, there is

a plutocratic assumption behind the phrase "Why should woman be

economically dependent upon man?" The answer is that among poor and

practical people she isn't; except in the sense in which he is

dependent upon her. A hunter has to tear his clothes; there must be

somebody to mend them. A fisher has to catch fish; there must be

somebody to cook them. It is surely quite clear that this modern notion

that woman is a mere "pretty clinging parasite," "a plaything," etc.,

arose through the somber contemplation of some rich banking family, in

which the banker, at least, went to the city and pretended to do

something, while the banker's wife went to the Park and did not pretend

to do anything at all. A poor man and his wife are a business

partnership. If one partner in a firm of publishers interviews the

authors while the other interviews the clerks, is one of them

economically dependent? Was Hodder a pretty parasite clinging to

Stoughton? Was Marshall a mere plaything for Snelgrove?

But of all the modern notions generated by mere wealth the worst is

this: the notion that domesticity is dull and tame. Inside the home

(they say) is dead decorum and routine; outside is adventure and

variety. This is indeed a rich man's opinion. The rich man knows that

his own house moves on vast and soundless wheels of wealth, is run by

regiments of servants, by a swift and silent ritual. On the other hand,

every sort of vagabondage of romance is open to him in the streets

outside. He has plenty of money and can afford to be a tramp. His

wildest adventure will end in a restaurant, while the yokel's tamest

adventure may end in a police-court. If he smashes a window he can pay

for it; if he smashes a man he can pension him. He can (like the

millionaire in the story) buy an hotel to get a glass of gin. And

because he, the luxurious man, dictates the tone of nearly all

"advanced" and "progressive" thought, we have almost forgotten what a

home really means to the overwhelming millions of mankind.

For the truth is, that to the moderately poor the home is the only

place of liberty. Nay, it is the only place of anarchy. It is the only

spot on the earth where a man can alter arrangements suddenly, make an

experiment or indulge in a whim. Everywhere else he goes he must accept

the strict rules of the shop, inn, club, or museum that he happens to

enter. He can eat his meals on the floor in his own house if he likes.

I often do it myself; it gives a curious, childish, poetic, picnic

feeling. There would be considerable trouble if I tried to do it in an

A.B.C. tea-shop. A man can wear a dressing gown and slippers in his

house; while I am sure that this would not be permitted at the Savoy,

though I never actually tested the point. If you go to a restaurant you

must drink some of the wines on the wine list, all of them if you

insist, but certainly some of them. But if you have a house and garden

you can try to make hollyhock tea or convolvulus wine if you like. For

a plain, hard-working man the home is not the one tame place in the

world of adventure. It is the one wild place in the world of rules and

set tasks. The home is the one place where he can put the carpet on the

ceiling or the slates on the floor if he wants to. When a man spends

every night staggering from bar to bar or from music-hall to

music-hall, we say that he is living an irregular life. But he is not;

he is living a highly regular life, under the dull, and often

oppressive, laws of such places. Some times he is not allowed even to

sit down in the bars; and frequently he is not allowed to sing in the

music-halls. Hotels may be defined as places where you are forced to

dress; and theaters may be defined as places where you are forbidden to

smoke. A man can only picnic at home.

Now I take, as I have said, this small human omnipotence, this

possession of a definite cell or chamber of liberty, as the working

model for the present inquiry. Whether we can give every English man a

free home of his own or not, at least we should desire it; and he

desires it. For the moment we speak of what he wants, not of what he

expects to get. He wants, far instance, a separate house; he does not

want a semi-detached house. He may be forced in the commercial race to

share one wall with another man. Similarly he might be forced in a

three-legged race to share one leg with another man; but it is not so

that he pictures himself in his dreams of elegance and liberty. Again,

he does not desire a flat. He can eat and sleep and praise God in a

flat; he can eat and sleep and praise God in a railway train. But a

railway train is not a house, because it is a house on wheels. And a

flat is not a house, because it is a house on stilts. An idea of earthy

contact and foundation, as well as an idea of separation and

independence, is a part of this instructive human picture.

I take, then, this one institution as a test. As every normal man

desires a woman, and children born of a woman, every normal man desires

a house of his own to put them into. He does not merely want a roof

above him and a chair below him; he wants an objective and visible

kingdom; a fire at which he can cook what food he likes, a door he can

open to what friends he chooses. This is the normal appetite of men; I

do not say there are not exceptions. There may be saints above the need

and philanthropists below it. Opalstein, now he is a duke, may have got

used to more than this; and when he was a convict may have got used to

less. But the normality of the thing is enormous. To give nearly

everybody ordinary houses would please nearly everybody; that is what I

assert without apology. Now in modern England (as you eagerly point

out) it is very difficult to give nearly everybody houses. Quite so; I

merely set up the desideratum; and ask the reader to leave it standing

there while he turns with me to a consideration of what really happens

in the social wars of our time.

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There is, let us say, a certain filthy rookery in Hoxton, dripping with

disease and honeycombed with crime and promiscuity. There are, let us

say, two noble and courageous young men, of pure intentions and (if you

prefer it) noble birth; let us call them Hudge and Gudge. Hudge, let us

say, is of a bustling sort; he points out that the people must at all

costs be got out of this den; he subscribes and collects money, but he

finds (despite the large financial interests of the Hudges) that the

thing will have to be done on the cheap if it is to be done on the

spot. Her therefore, runs up a row of tall bare tenements like

beehives; and soon has all the poor people bundled into their little

brick cells, which are certainly better than their old quarters, in so

far as they are weather proof, well ventilated and supplied with clean

water. But Gudge has a more delicate nature. He feels a nameless

something lacking in the little brick boxes; he raises numberless

objections; he even assails the celebrated Hudge Report, with the Gudge

Minority Report; and by the end of a year or so has come to telling

Hudge heatedly that the people were much happier where they were

before. As the people preserve in both places precisely the same air of

dazed amiability, it is very difficult to find out which is right. But

at least one might safely say that no people ever liked stench or

starvation as such, but only some peculiar pleasures en tangled with

them. Not so feels the sensitive Gudge. Long before the final quarrel

(Hudge v. Gudge and Another), Gudge has succeeded in persuading himself

that slums and stinks are really very nice things; that the habit of

sleeping fourteen in a room is what has made our England great; and

that the smell of open drains is absolutely essential to the rearing of

a viking breed.

But, meanwhile, has there been no degeneration in Hudge? Alas, I fear

there has. Those maniacally ugly buildings which he originally put up

as unpretentious sheds barely to shelter human life, grow every day

more and more lovely to his deluded eye. Things he would never have

dreamed of defending, except as crude necessities, things like common

kitchens or infamous asbestos stoves, begin to shine quite sacredly

before him, merely because they reflect the wrath of Gudge. He

maintains, with the aid of eager little books by Socialists, that man

is really happier in a hive than in a house. The practical difficulty

of keeping total strangers out of your bedroom he describes as

Brotherhood; and the necessity for climbing twenty-three flights of

cold stone stairs, I dare say he calls Effort. The net result of their

philanthropic adventure is this: that one has come to defending

indefensible slums and still more indefensible slum-landlords, while

the other has come to treating as divine the sheds and pipes which he

only meant as desperate. Gudge is now a corrupt and apoplectic old Tory

in the Carlton Club; if you mention poverty to him he roars at you in a

thick, hoarse voice something that is conjectured to be "Do 'em good!"

Nor is Hudge more happy; for he is a lean vegetarian with a gray,

pointed beard and an unnaturally easy smile, who goes about telling

everybody that at last we shall all sleep in one universal bedroom; and

he lives in a Garden City, like one forgotten of God.

Such is the lamentable history of Hudge and Gudge; which I merely

introduce as a type of an endless and exasperating misunderstanding

which is always occurring in modern England. To get men out of a

rookery men are put into a tenement; and at the beginning the healthy

human soul loathes them both. A man's first desire is to get away as

far as possible from the rookery, even should his mad course lead him

to a model dwelling. The second desire is, naturally, to get away from

the model dwelling, even if it should lead a man back to the rookery.

But I am neither a Hudgian nor a Gudgian; and I think the mistakes of

these two famous and fascinating persons arose from one simple fact.

They arose from the fact that neither Hudge nor Gudge had ever thought

for an instant what sort of house a man might probably like for

himself. In short, they did not begin with the ideal; and, therefore,

were not practical politicians.

We may now return to the purpose of our awkward parenthesis about the

praise of the future and the failures of the past. A house of his own

being the obvious ideal for every man, we may now ask (taking this need

as typical of all such needs) why he hasn't got it; and whether it is

in any philosophical sense his own fault. Now, I think that in some

philosophical sense it is his own fault, I think in a yet more

philosophical sense it is the fault of his philosophy. And this is what

I have now to attempt to explain.

Burke, a fine rhetorician, who rarely faced realities, said, I think,

that an Englishman's house is his castle. This is honestly

entertaining; for as it happens the Englishman is almost the only man

in Europe whose house is not his castle. Nearly everywhere else exists

the assumption of peasant proprietorship; that a poor man may be a

landlord, though he is only lord of his own land. Making the landlord

and the tenant the same person has certain trivial advantages, as that

the tenant pays no rent, while the landlord does a little work. But I

am not concerned with the defense of small proprietorship, but merely

with the fact that it exists almost everywhere except in England. It is

also true, however, that this estate of small possession is attacked

everywhere today; it has never existed among ourselves, and it may be

destroyed among our neighbors. We have, therefore, to ask ourselves

what it is in human affairs generally, and in this domestic ideal in

particular, that has really ruined the natural human creation,

especially in this country.

Man has always lost his way. He has been a tramp ever since Eden; but

he always knew, or thought he knew, what he was looking for. Every man

has a house somewhere in the elaborate cosmos; his house waits for him

waist deep in slow Norfolk rivers or sunning itself upon Sussex downs.

Man has always been looking for that home which is the subject matter

of this book. But in the bleak and blinding hail of skepticism to which

he has been now so long subjected, he has begun for the first time to

be chilled, not merely in his hopes, but in his desires. For the first

time in history he begins really to doubt the object of his wanderings

on the earth. He has always lost his way; but now he has lost his

address.

Under the pressure of certain upper-class philosophies (or in other

words, under the pressure of Hudge and Gudge) the average man has

really become bewildered about the goal of his efforts; and his

efforts, therefore, grow feebler and feebler. His simple notion of

having a home of his own is derided as bourgeois, as sentimental, or as

despicably Christian. Under various verbal forms he is recommended to

go on to the streets-- which is called Individualism; or to the

work-house--which is called Collectivism. We shall consider this

process somewhat more carefully in a moment. But it may be said here

that Hudge and Gudge, or the governing class generally, will never fail

for lack of some modern phrase to cover their ancient predominance. The

great lords will refuse the English peasant his three acres and a cow

on advanced grounds, if they cannot refuse it longer on reactionary

grounds. They will deny him the three acres on grounds of State

Ownership. They will forbid him the cow on grounds of humanitarianism.

And this brings us to the ultimate analysis of this singular influence

that has prevented doctrinal demands by the English people. There are,

I believe, some who still deny that England is governed by an

oligarchy. It is quite enough for me to know that a man might have gone

to sleep some thirty years ago over the day's newspaper and woke up

last week over the later newspaper, and fancied he was reading about

the same people. In one paper he would have found a Lord Robert Cecil,

a Mr. Gladstone, a Mr. Lyttleton, a Churchill, a Chamberlain, a

Trevelyan, an Acland. In the other paper he would find a Lord Robert

Cecil, a Mr. Gladstone, a Mr. Lyttleton, a Churchill, a Chamberlain, a

Trevelyan, an Acland. If this is not being governed by families I

cannot imagine what it is. I suppose it is being governed by

extraordinary democratic coincidences.

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But we are not here concerned with the nature and existence of the

aristocracy, but with the origin of its peculiar power, why is it the

last of the true oligarchies of Europe; and why does there seem no very

immediate prospect of our seeing the end of it? The explanation is

simple though it remains strangely unnoticed. The friends of

aristocracy often praise it for preserving ancient and gracious

traditions. The enemies of aristocracy often blame it for clinging to

cruel or antiquated customs. Both its enemies and its friends are

wrong. Generally speaking the aristocracy does not preserve either good

or bad traditions; it does not preserve anything except game. Who would

dream of looking among aristocrats anywhere for an old custom? One

might as well look for an old costume! The god of the aristocrats is

not tradition, but fashion, which is the opposite of tradition. If you

wanted to find an old-world Norwegian head-dress, would you look for it

in the Scandinavian Smart Set? No; the aristocrats never have customs;

at the best they have habits, like the animals. Only the mob has

customs.

The real power of the English aristocrats has lain in exactly the

opposite of tradition. The simple key to the power of our upper classes

is this: that they have always kept carefully on the side of what is

called Progress. They have always been up to date, and this comes quite

easy to an aristocracy. For the aristocracy are the supreme instances

of that frame of mind of which we spoke just now. Novelty is to them a

luxury verging on a necessity. They, above all, are so bored with the

past and with the present, that they gape, with a horrible hunger, for

the future.

But whatever else the great lords forgot they never forgot that it was

their business to stand for the new things, for whatever was being most

talked about among university dons or fussy financiers. Thus they were

on the side of the Reformation against the Church, of the Whigs against

the Stuarts, of the Baconian science against the old philosophy, of the

manufacturing system against the operatives, and (to-day) of the

increased power of the State against the old-fashioned individualists.

In short, the rich are always modern; it is their business. But the

immediate effect of this fact upon the question we are studying is

somewhat singular.

In each of the separate holes or quandaries in which the ordinary

Englishman has been placed, he has been told that his situation is, for

some particular reason, all for the best. He woke up one fine morning

and discovered that the public things, which for eight hundred years he

had used at once as inns and sanctuaries, had all been suddenly and

savagely abolished, to increase the private wealth of about six or

seven men. One would think he might have been annoyed at that; in many

places he was, and was put down by the soldiery. But it was not merely

the army that kelp him quiet. He was kept quiet by the sages as well as

the soldiers; the six or seven men who took away the inns of the poor

told him that they were not doing it for themselves, but for the

religion of the future, the great dawn of Protestantism and truth. So

whenever a seventeenth century noble was caught pulling down a

peasant's fence and stealing his field, the noble pointed excitedly at

the face of Charles I or James II (which at that moment, perhaps, wore

a cross expression) and thus diverted the simple peasant's attention.

The great Puritan lords created the Commonwealth, and destroyed the

common land. They saved their poorer countrymen from the disgrace of

paying Ship Money, by taking from them the plow money and spade money

which they were doubtless too weak to guard. A fine old English rhyme

has immortalized this easy aristocratic habit--

You prosecute the man or woman Who steals the goose from off the

common, But leave the larger felon loose Who steals the common from the

goose.

But here, as in the case of the monasteries, we confront the strange

problem of submission. If they stole the common from the goose, one can

only say that he was a great goose to stand it. The truth is that they

reasoned with the goose; they explained to him that all this was needed

to get the Stuart fox over seas. So in the nineteenth century the great

nobles who became mine-owners and railway directors earnestly assured

everybody that they did not do this from preference, but owing to a

newly discovered Economic Law. So the prosperous politicians of our own

generation introduce bills to prevent poor mothers from going about

with their own babies; or they calmly forbid their tenants to drink

beer in public inns. But this insolence is not (as you would suppose)

howled at by everybody as outrageous feudalism. It is gently rebuked as

Socialism. For an aristocracy is always progressive; it is a form of

going the pace. Their parties grow later and later at night; for they

are trying to live to-morrow.

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Thus the Future of which we spoke at the beginning has (in England at

least) always been the ally of tyranny. The ordinary Englishman has

been duped out of his old possessions, such as they were, and always in

the name of progress. The destroyers of the abbeys took away his bread

and gave him a stone, assuring him that it was a precious stone, the

white pebble of the Lord's elect. They took away his maypole and his

original rural life and promised him instead the Golden Age of Peace

and Commerce inaugurated at the Crystal Palace. And now they are taking

away the little that remains of his dignity as a householder and the

head of a family, promising him instead Utopias which are called

(appropriately enough) "Anticipations" or "News from Nowhere." We come

back, in fact, to the main feature which has already been mentioned.

The past is communal: the future must be individualist. In the past are

all the evils of democracy, variety and violence and doubt, but the

future is pure despotism, for the future is pure caprice. Yesterday, I

know I was a human fool, but to-morrow I can easily be the Superman.

The modern Englishman, however, is like a man who should be perpetually

kept out, for one reason after another, from the house in which he had

meant his married life to begin. This man (Jones let us call him) has

always desired the divinely ordinary things; he has married for love,

he has chosen or built a small house that fits like a coat; he is ready

to be a great grandfather and a local god. And just as he is moving in,

something goes wrong. Some tyranny, personal or political, suddenly

debars him from the home; and he has to take his meals in the front

garden. A passing philosopher (who is also, by a mere coincidence, the

man who turned him out) pauses, and leaning elegantly on the railings,

explains to him that he is now living that bold life upon the bounty of

nature which will be the life of the sublime future. He finds life in

the front garden more bold than bountiful, and has to move into mean

lodgings in the next spring. The philosopher (who turned him out),

happening to call at these lodgings, with the probable intention of

raising the rent, stops to explain to him that he is now in the real

life of mercantile endeavor; the economic struggle between him and the

landlady is the only thing out of which, in the sublime future, the

wealth of nations can come. He is defeated in the economic struggle,

and goes to the workhouse. The philosopher who turned him out

(happening at that very moment to be inspecting the workhouse) assures

him that he is now at last in that golden republic which is the goal of

mankind; he is in an equal, scientific, Socialistic commonwealth, owned

by the State and ruled by public officers; in fact, the commonwealth of

the sublime future.

Nevertheless, there are signs that the irrational Jones still dreams at

night of this old idea of having an ordinary home. He asked for so

little, and he has been offered so much. He has been offered bribes of

worlds and systems; he has been offered Eden and Utopia and the New

Jerusalem, and he only wanted a house; and that has been refused him.

Such an apologue is literally no exaggeration of the facts of English

history. The rich did literally turn the poor out of the old guest

house on to the road, briefly telling them that it was the road of

progress. They did literally force them into factories and the modern

wage-slavery, assuring them all the time that this was the only way to

wealth and civilization. Just as they had dragged the rustic from the

convent food and ale by saying that the streets of heaven were paved

with gold, so now they dragged him from the village food and ale by

telling him that the streets of London were paved with gold. As he

entered the gloomy porch of Puritanism, so he entered the gloomy porch

of Industrialism, being told that each of them was the gate of the

future. Hitherto he has only gone from prison to prison, nay, into

darkening prisons, for Calvinism opened one small window upon heaven.

And now he is asked, in the same educated and authoritative tones, to

enter another dark porch, at which he has to surrender, into unseen

hands, his children, his small possessions and all the habits of his

fathers.

Whether this last opening be in truth any more inviting than the old

openings of Puritanism and Industrialism can be discussed later. But

there can be little doubt, I think, that if some form of Collectivism

is imposed upon England it will be imposed, as everything else has

been, by an instructed political class upon a people partly apathetic

and partly hypnotized. The aristocracy will be as ready to "administer"

Collectivism as they were to administer Puritanism or Manchesterism; in

some ways such a centralized political power is necessarily attractive

to them. It will not be so hard as some innocent Socialists seem to

suppose to induce the Honorable Tomnoddy to take over the milk supply

as well as the stamp supply--at an increased salary. Mr. Bernard Shaw

has remarked that rich men are better than poor men on parish councils

because they are free from "financial timidity." Now, the English

ruling class is quite free from financial timidity. The Duke of Sussex

will be quite ready to be Administrator of Sussex at the same screw.

Sir William Harcourt, that typical aristocrat, put it quite correctly.

"We" (that is, the aristocracy) "are all Socialists now."

But this is not the essential note on which I desire to end. My main

contention is that, whether necessary or not, both Industrialism and

Collectivism have been accepted as necessities-- not as naked ideals or

desires. Nobody liked the Manchester School; it was endured as the only

way of producing wealth. Nobody likes the Marxian school; it is endured

as the only way of preventing poverty. Nobody's real heart is in the

idea of preventing a free man from owning his own farm, or an old woman

from cultivating her own garden, any more than anybody's real heart was

in the heartless battle of the machines. The purpose of this chapter is

sufficiently served in indicating that this proposal also is a pis

aller, a desperate second best-- like teetotalism. I do not propose to

prove here that Socialism is a poison; it is enough if I maintain that

it is a medicine and not a wine.

The idea of private property universal but private, the idea of

families free but still families, of domesticity democratic but still

domestic, of one man one house--this remains the real vision and magnet

of mankind. The world may accept something more official and general,

less human and intimate. But the world will be like a broken-hearted

woman who makes a humdrum marriage because she may not make a happy

one; Socialism may be the world's deliverance. but it is not the

world's desire.

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I have cast about widely to find a title for this section; and I

confess that the word "Imperialism" is a clumsy version of my meaning.

But no other word came nearer; "Militarism" would have been even more

misleading, and "The Superman" makes nonsense of any discussion that he

enters. Perhaps, upon the whole, the word "Caesarism" would have been

better; but I desire a popular word; and Imperialism (as the reader

will perceive) does cover for the most part the men and theories that I

mean to discuss.

This small confusion is increased, however, by the fact that I do also

disbelieve in Imperialism in its popular sense, as a mode or theory of

the patriotic sentiment of this country. But popular Imperialism in

England has very little to do with the sort of Caesarean Imperialism I

wish to sketch. I differ from the Colonial idealism of Rhodes' and

Kipling; but I do not think, as some of its opponents do, that it is an

insolent creation of English harshness and rapacity. Imperialism, I

think, is a fiction created, not by English hardness, but by English

softness; nay, in a sense, even by English kindness.

The reasons for believing in Australia are mostly as sentimental as the

most sentimental reasons for believing in heaven. New South Wales is

quite literally regarded as a place where the wicked cease from

troubling and the weary are at rest; that is, a paradise for uncles who

have turned dishonest and for nephews who are born tired. British

Columbia is in strict sense a fairyland, it is a world where a magic

and irrational luck is supposed to attend the youngest sons. This

strange optimism about the ends of the earth is an English weakness;

but to show that it is not a coldness or a harshness it is quite

sufficient to say that no one shared it more than that gigantic English

sentimentalist--the great Charles Dickens. The end of "David

Copperfield" is unreal not merely because it is an optimistic ending,

but because it is an Imperialistic ending. The decorous British

happiness planned out for David Copperfield and Agnes would be

embarrassed by the perpetual presence of the hopeless tragedy of Emily,

or the more hopeless farce of Micawber. Therefore, both Emily and

Micawber are shipped off to a vague colony where changes come over them

with no conceivable cause, except the climate. The tragic woman becomes

contented and the comic man becomes responsible, solely as the result

of a sea voyage and the first sight of a kangaroo.

To Imperialism in the light political sense, therefore, my only

objection is that it is an illusion of comfort; that an Empire whose

heart is failing should be specially proud of the extremities, is to me

no more sublime a fact than that an old dandy whose brain is gone

should still be proud of his legs. It consoles men for the evident

ugliness and apathy of England with legends of fair youth and heroic

strenuousness in distant continents and islands. A man can sit amid the

squalor of Seven Dials and feel that life is innocent and godlike in

the bush or on the veldt. Just so a man might sit in the squalor of

Seven Dials and feel that life was innocent and godlike in Brixton and

Surbiton. Brixton and Surbiton are "new"; they are expanding; they are

"nearer to nature," in the sense that they have eaten up nature mile by

mile. The only objection is the objection of fact. The young men of

Brixton are not young giants. The lovers of Surbiton are not all pagan

poets, singing with the sweet energy of the spring. Nor are the people

of the Colonies when you meet them young giants or pagan poets. They

are mostly Cockneys who have lost their last music of real things by

getting out of the sound of Bow Bells. Mr. Rudyard Kipling, a man of

real though decadent genius, threw a theoretic glamour over them which

is already fading. Mr. Kipling is, in a precise and rather startling

sense, the exception that proves the rule. For he has imagination, of

an oriental and cruel kind, but he has it, not because he grew up in a

new country, but precisely because he grew up in the oldest country

upon earth. He is rooted in a past-- an Asiatic past. He might never

have written "Kabul River" if he had been born in Melbourne.

I say frankly, therefore (lest there should be any air of evasion),

that Imperialism in its common patriotic pretensions appears to me both

weak and perilous. It is the attempt of a European country to create a

kind of sham Europe which it can dominate, instead of the real Europe,

which it can only share. It is a love of living with one's inferiors.

The notion of restoring the Roman Empire by oneself and for oneself is

a dream that has haunted every Christian nation in a different shape

and in almost every shape as a snare. The Spanish are a consistent and

conservative people; therefore they embodied that attempt at Empire in

long and lingering dynasties. The French are a violent people, and

therefore they twice conquered that Empire by violence of arms. The

English are above all a poetical and optimistic people; and therefore

their Empire is something vague and yet sympathetic, something distant

and yet dear. But this dream of theirs of being powerful in the

uttermost places, though a native weakness, is still a weakness in

them; much more of a weakness than gold was to Spain or glory to

Napoleon. If ever we were in collision with our real brothers and

rivals we should leave all this fancy out of account. We should no more

dream of pitting Australian armies against German than of pitting

Tasmanian sculpture against French. I have thus explained, lest anyone

should accuse me of concealing an unpopular attitude, why I do not

believe in Imperialism as commonly understood. I think it not merely an

occasional wrong to other peoples, but a continuous feebleness, a

running sore, in my own. But it is also true that I have dwelt on this

Imperialism that is an amiable delusion partly in order to show how

different it is from the deeper, more sinister and yet more persuasive

thing that I have been forced to call Imperialism for the convenience

of this chapter. In order to get to the root of this evil and quite

un-English Imperialism we must cast back and begin anew with a more

general discussion of the first needs of human intercourse.

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It is admitted, one may hope, that common things are never commonplace.

Birth is covered with curtains precisely because it is a staggering and

monstrous prodigy. Death and first love, though they happen to

everybody, can stop one's heart with the very thought of them. But

while this is granted, something further may be claimed. It is not

merely true that these universal things are strange; it is moreover

true that they are subtle. In the last analysis most common things will

be found to be highly complicated. Some men of science do indeed get

over the difficulty by dealing only with the easy part of it: thus,

they will call first love the instinct of sex, and the awe of death the

instinct of self-preservation. But this is only getting over the

difficulty of describing peacock green by calling it blue. There is

blue in it. That there is a strong physical element in both romance and

the Memento Mori makes them if possible more baffling than if they had

been wholly intellectual. No man could say exactly how much his

sexuality was colored by a clean love of beauty, or by the mere boyish

itch for irrevocable adventures, like running away to sea. No man could

say how far his animal dread of the end was mixed up with mystical

traditions touching morals and religion. It is exactly because these

things are animal, but not quite animal, that the dance of all the

difficulties begins. The materialists analyze the easy part, deny the

hard part and go home to their tea.

It is complete error to suppose that because a thing is vulgar

therefore it is not refined; that is, subtle and hard to define. A

drawing-room song of my youth which began "In the gloaming, O, my

darling," was vulgar enough as a song; but the connection between human

passion and the twilight is none the less an exquisite and even

inscrutable thing. Or to take another obvious instance: the jokes about

a mother-in-law are scarcely delicate, but the problem of a

mother-in-law is extremely delicate. A mother-in-law is subtle because

she is a thing like the twilight. She is a mystical blend of two

inconsistent things-- law and a mother. The caricatures misrepresent

her; but they arise out of a real human enigma. "Comic Cuts" deals with

the difficulty wrongly, but it would need George Meredith at his best

to deal with the difficulty rightly. The nearest statement of the

problem perhaps is this: it is not that a mother-in-law must be nasty,

but that she must be very nice.

But it is best perhaps to take in illustration some daily custom we

have all heard despised as vulgar or trite. Take, for the sake of

argument, the custom of talking about the weather. Stevenson calls it

"the very nadir and scoff of good conversationalists." Now there are

very deep reasons for talking about the weather, reasons that are

delicate as well as deep; they lie in layer upon layer of stratified

sagacity. First of all it is a gesture of primeval worship. The sky

must be invoked; and to begin everything with the weather is a sort of

pagan way of beginning everything with prayer. Jones and Brown talk

about the weather: but so do Milton and Shelley. Then it is an

expression of that elementary idea in politeness--equality. For the

very word politeness is only the Greek for citizenship. The word

politeness is akin to the word policeman: a charming thought. Properly

understood, the citizen should be more polite than the gentleman;

perhaps the policeman should be the most courtly and elegant of the

three. But all good manners must obviously begin with the sharing of

something in a simple style. Two men should share an umbrella; if they

have not got an umbrella, they should at least share the rain, with all

its rich potentialities of wit and philosophy. "For He maketh His sun

to shine...." This is the second element in the weather; its

recognition of human equality in that we all have our hats under the

dark blue spangled umbrella of the universe. Arising out of this is the

third wholesome strain in the custom; I mean that it begins with the

body and with our inevitable bodily brotherhood. All true friendliness

begins with fire and food and drink and the recognition of rain or

frost. Those who will not begin at the bodily end of things are already

prigs and may soon be Christian Scientists. Each human soul has in a

sense to enact for itself the gigantic humility of the Incarnation.

Every man must descend into the flesh to meet mankind.

Briefly, in the mere observation "a fine day" there is the whole great

human idea of comradeship. Now, pure comradeship is another of those

broad and yet bewildering things. We all enjoy it; yet when we come to

talk about it we almost always talk nonsense, chiefly because we

suppose it to be a simpler affair than it is. It is simple to conduct;

but it is by no means simple to analyze. Comradeship is at the most

only one half of human life; the other half is Love, a thing so

different that one might fancy it had been made for another universe.

And I do not mean mere sex love; any kind of concentrated passion,

maternal love, or even the fiercer kinds of friendship are in their

nature alien to pure comradeship. Both sides are essential to life; and

both are known in differing degrees to everybody of every age or sex.

But very broadly speaking it may still be said that women stand for the

dignity of love and men for the dignity of comradeship. I mean that the

institution would hardly be expected if the males of the tribe did not

mount guard over it. The affections in which women excel have so much

more authority and intensity that pure comradeship would be washed away

if it were not rallied and guarded in clubs, corps, colleges, banquets

and regiments. Most of us have heard the voice in which the hostess

tells her husband not to sit too long over the cigars. It is the

dreadful voice of Love, seeking to destroy Comradeship.

All true comradeship has in it those three elements which I have

remarked in the ordinary exclamation about the weather. First, it has a

sort of broad philosophy like the common sky, emphasizing that we are

all under the same cosmic conditions. We are all in the same boat, the

"winged rock" of Mr. Herbert Trench. Secondly, it recognizes this bond

as the essential one; for comradeship is simply humanity seen in that

one aspect in which men are really equal. The old writers were entirely

wise when they talked of the equality of men; but they were also very

wise in not mentioning women. Women are always authoritarian; they are

always above or below; that is why marriage is a sort of poetical

see-saw. There are only three things in the world that women do not

understand; and they are Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. But men (a

class little understood in the modern world) find these things the

breath of their nostrils; and our most learned ladies will not even

begin to understand them until they make allowance for this kind of

cool camaraderie. Lastly, it contains the third quality of the weather,

the insistence upon the body and its indispensable satisfaction. No one

has even begun to understand comradeship who does not accept with it a

certain hearty eagerness in eating, drinking, or smoking, an uproarious

materialism which to many women appears only hoggish. You may call the

thing an orgy or a sacrament; it is certainly an essential. It is at

root a resistance to the superciliousness of the individual. Nay, its

very swaggering and howling are humble. In the heart of its rowdiness

there is a sort of mad modesty; a desire to melt the separate soul into

the mass of unpretentious masculinity. It is a clamorous confession of

the weakness of all flesh. No man must be superior to the things that

are common to men. This sort of equality must be bodily and gross and

comic. Not only are we all in the same boat, but we are all seasick.

The word comradeship just now promises to become as fatuous as the word

"affinity." There are clubs of a Socialist sort where all the members,

men and women, call each other "Comrade." I have no serious emotions,

hostile or otherwise, about this particular habit: at the worst it is

conventionality, and at the best flirtation. I am convinced here only

to point out a rational principle. If you choose to lump all flowers

together, lilies and dahlias and tulips and chrysanthemums and call

them all daisies, you will find that you have spoiled the very fine

word daisy. If you choose to call every human attachment comradeship,

if you include under that name the respect of a youth for a venerable

prophetess, the interest of a man in a beautiful woman who baffles him,

the pleasure of a philosophical old fogy in a girl who is impudent and

innocent, the end of the meanest quarrel or the beginning of the most

mountainous love; if you are going to call all these comradeship, you

will gain nothing, you will only lose a word. Daisies are obvious and

universal and open; but they are only one kind of flower. Comradeship

is obvious and universal and open; but it is only one kind of

affection; it has characteristics that would destroy any other kind.

Anyone who has known true comradeship in a club or in a regiment, knows

that it is impersonal. There is a pedantic phrase used in debating

clubs which is strictly true to the masculine emotion; they call it

"speaking to the question." Women speak to each other; men speak to the

subject they are speaking about. Many an honest man has sat in a ring

of his five best friends under heaven and forgotten who was in the room

while he explained some system. This is not peculiar to intellectual

men; men are all theoretical, whether they are talking about God or

about golf. Men are all impersonal; that is to say, republican. No one

remembers after a really good talk who has said the good things. Every

man speaks to a visionary multitude; a mystical cloud, that is called

the club.

It is obvious that this cool and careless quality which is essential to

the collective affection of males involves disadvantages and dangers.

It leads to spitting; it leads to coarse speech; it must lead to these

things so long as it is honorable; comradeship must be in some degree

ugly. The moment beauty is mentioned in male friendship, the nostrils

are stopped with the smell of abominable things. Friendship must be

physically dirty if it is to be morally clean. It must be in its shirt

sleeves. The chaos of habits that always goes with males when left

entirely to themselves has only one honorable cure; and that is the

strict discipline of a monastery. Anyone who has seen our unhappy young

idealists in East End Settlements losing their collars in the wash and

living on tinned salmon will fully understand why it was decided by the

wisdom of St. Bernard or St. Benedict, that if men were to live without

women, they must not live without rules. Something of the same sort of

artificial exactitude, of course, is obtained in an army; and an army

also has to be in many ways monastic; only that it has celibacy without

chastity. But these things do not apply to normal married men. These

have a quite sufficient restraint on their instinctive anarchy in the

savage common-sense of the other sex. There is only one very timid sort

of man that is not afraid of women.

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Now this masculine love of an open and level camaraderie is the life

within all democracies and attempts to govern by debate; without it the

republic would be a dead formula. Even as it is, of course, the spirit

of democracy frequently differs widely from the letter, and a pothouse

is often a better test than a Parliament. Democracy in its human sense

is not arbitrament by the majority; it is not even arbitrament by

everybody. It can be more nearly defined as arbitrament by anybody. I

mean that it rests on that club habit of taking a total stranger for

granted, of assuming certain things to be inevitably common to yourself

and him. Only the things that anybody may be presumed to hold have the

full authority of democracy. Look out of the window and notice the

first man who walks by. The Liberals may have swept England with an

over-whelming majority; but you would not stake a button that the man

is a Liberal. The Bible may be read in all schools and respected in all

law courts; but you would not bet a straw that he believes in the

Bible. But you would bet your week's wages, let us say, that he

believes in wearing clothes. You would bet that he believes that

physical courage is a fine thing, or that parents have authority over

children. Of course, he might be the millionth man who does not believe

these things; if it comes to that, he might be the Bearded Lady dressed

up as a man. But these prodigies are quite a different thing from any

mere calculation of numbers. People who hold these views are not a

minority, but a monstrosity. But of these universal dogmas that have

full democratic authority the only test is this test of anybody. What

you would observe before any newcomer in a tavern--that is the real

English law. The first man you see from the window, he is the King of

England.

The decay of taverns, which is but a part of the general decay of

democracy, has undoubtedly weakened this masculine spirit of equality.

I remember that a roomful of Socialists literally laughed when I told

them that there were no two nobler words in all poetry than Public

House. They thought it was a joke. Why they should think it a joke,

since they want to make all houses public houses, I cannot imagine. But

if anyone wishes to see the real rowdy egalitarianism which is

necessary (to males, at least) he can find it as well as anywhere in

the great old tavern disputes which come down to us in such books as

Boswell's Johnson. It is worth while to mention that one name

especially because the modern world in its morbidity has done it a

strange injustice. The demeanor of Johnson, it is said, was "harsh and

despotic." It was occasionally harsh, but it was never despotic.

Johnson was not in the least a despot; Johnson was a demagogue, he

shouted against a shouting crowd. The very fact that he wrangled with

other people is proof that other people were allowed to wrangle with

him. His very brutality was based on the idea of an equal scrimmage,

like that of football. It is strictly true that he bawled and banged

the table because he was a modest man. He was honestly afraid of being

overwhelmed or even overlooked. Addison had exquisite manners and was

the king of his company; he was polite to everybody; but superior to

everybody; therefore he has been handed down forever in the immortal

insult of Pope--

"Like Cato, give his little Senate laws And sit attentive to his own

applause."

Johnson, so far from being king of his company, was a sort of Irish

Member in his own Parliament. Addison was a courteous superior and was

hated. Johnson was an insolent equal and therefore was loved by all who

knew him, and handed down in a marvellous book, which is one of the

mere miracles of love.

This doctrine of equality is essential to conversation; so much may be

admitted by anyone who knows what conversation is. Once arguing at a

table in a tavern the most famous man on earth would wish to be

obscure, so that his brilliant remarks might blaze like the stars on

the background of his obscurity. To anything worth calling a man

nothing can be conceived more cold or cheerless than to be king of your

company. But it may be said that in masculine sports and games, other

than the great game of debate, there is definite emulation and eclipse.

There is indeed emulation, but this is only an ardent sort of equality.

Games are competitive, because that is the only way of making them

exciting. But if anyone doubts that men must forever return to the

ideal of equality, it is only necessary to answer that there is such a

thing as a handicap. If men exulted in mere superiority, they would

seek to see how far such superiority could go; they would be glad when

one strong runner came in miles ahead of all the rest. But what men

like is not the triumph of superiors, but the struggle of equals; and,

therefore, they introduce even into their competitive sports an

artificial equality. It is sad to think how few of those who arrange

our sporting handicaps can be supposed with any probability to realize

that they are abstract and even severe republicans.

No; the real objection to equality and self-rule has nothing to do with

any of these free and festive aspects of mankind; all men are democrats

when they are happy. The philosophic opponent of democracy would

substantially sum up his position by saying that it "will not work."

Before going further, I will register in passing a protest against the

assumption that working is the one test of humanity. Heaven does not

work; it plays. Men are most themselves when they are free; and if I

find that men are snobs in their work but democrats on their holidays,

I shall take the liberty to believe their holidays. But it is this

question of work which really perplexes the question of equality; and

it is with that that we must now deal. Perhaps the truth can be put

most pointedly thus: that democracy has one real enemy, and that is

civilization. Those utilitarian miracles which science has made are

anti-democratic, not so much in their perversion, or even in their

practical result, as in their primary shape and purpose. The

Frame-Breaking Rioters were right; not perhaps in thinking that

machines would make fewer men workmen; but certainly in thinking that

machines would make fewer men masters. More wheels do mean fewer

handles; fewer handles do mean fewer hands. The machinery of science

must be individualistic and isolated. A mob can shout round a palace;

but a mob cannot shout down a telephone. The specialist appears and

democracy is half spoiled at a stroke.

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The common conception among the dregs of Darwinian culture is that men

have slowly worked their way out of inequality into a state of

comparative equality. The truth is, I fancy, almost exactly the

opposite. All men have normally and naturally begun with the idea of

equality; they have only abandoned it late and reluctantly, and always

for some material reason of detail. They have never naturally felt that

one class of men was superior to another; they have always been driven

to assume it through certain practical limitations of space and time.

For example, there is one element which must always tend to

oligarchy--or rather to despotism; I mean the element of hurry. If the

house has caught fire a man must ring up the fire engines; a committee

cannot ring them up. If a camp is surprised by night somebody must give

the order to fire; there is no time to vote it. It is solely a question

of the physical limitations of time and space; not at all of any mental

limitations in the mass of men commanded. If all the people in the

house were men of destiny it would still be better that they should not

all talk into the telephone at once; nay, it would be better that the

silliest man of all should speak uninterrupted. If an army actually

consisted of nothing but Hanibals and Napoleons, it would still be

better in the case of a surprise that they should not all give orders

together. Nay, it would be better if the stupidest of them all gave the

orders. Thus, we see that merely military subordination, so far from

resting on the inequality of men, actually rests on the equality of

men. Discipline does not involve the Carlylean notion that somebody is

always right when everybody is wrong, and that we must discover and

crown that somebody. On the contrary, discipline means that in certain

frightfully rapid circumstances, one can trust anybody so long as he is

not everybody. The military spirit does not mean (as Carlyle fancied)

obeying the strongest and wisest man. On the contrary, the military

spirit means, if anything, obeying the weakest and stupidest man,

obeying him merely because he is a man, and not a thousand men.

Submission to a weak man is discipline. Submission to a strong man is

only servility.

Now it can be easily shown that the thing we call aristocracy in Europe

is not in its origin and spirit an aristocracy at all. It is not a

system of spiritual degrees and distinctions like, for example, the

caste system of India, or even like the old Greek distinction between

free men and slaves. It is simply the remains of a military

organization, framed partly to sustain the sinking Roman Empire, partly

to break and avenge the awful onslaught of Islam. The word Duke simply

means Colonel, just as the word Emperor simply means

Commander-in-Chief. The whole story is told in the single title of

Counts of the Holy Roman Empire, which merely means officers in the

European army against the contemporary Yellow Peril. Now in an army

nobody ever dreams of supposing that difference of rank represents a

difference of moral reality. Nobody ever says about a regiment, "Your

Major is very humorous and energetic; your Colonel, of course, must be

even more humorous and yet more energetic " No one ever says, in

reporting a mess-room conversation, "Lieutenant Jones was very witty,

but was naturally inferior to Captain Smith." The essence of an army is

the idea of official inequality, founded on unofficial equality. The

Colonel is not obeyed because he is the best man, but because he is the

Colonel. Such was probably the spirit of the system of dukes and counts

when it first arose out of the military spirit and military necessities

of Rome. With the decline of those necessities it has gradually ceased

to have meaning as a military organization, and become honeycombed with

unclean plutocracy. Even now it is not a spiritual aristocracy--it is

not so bad as all that. It is simply an army without an enemy--billeted

upon the people.

Man, therefore, has a specialist as well as comrade-like aspect; and

the case of militarism is not the only case of such specialist

submission. The tinker and tailor, as well as the soldier and sailor,

require a certain rigidity of rapidity of action: at least, if the

tinker is not organized that is largely why he does not tink on any

large scale. The tinker and tailor often represent the two nomadic

races in Europe: the Gipsy and the Jew; but the Jew alone has influence

because he alone accepts some sort of discipline. Man, we say, has two

sides, the specialist side where he must have subordination, and the

social side where he must have equality. There is a truth in the saying

that ten tailors go to make a man; but we must remember also that ten

Poets Laureate or ten Astronomers Royal go to make a man, too. Ten

million tradesmen go to make Man himself; but humanity consists of

tradesmen when they are not talking shop. Now the peculiar peril of our

time, which I call for argument's sake Imperialism or Caesarism, is the

complete eclipse of comradeship and equality by specialism and

domination.

There are only two kinds of social structure conceivable-- personal

government and impersonal government. If my anarchic friends will not

have rules--they will have rulers. Preferring personal government, with

its tact and flexibility, is called Royalism. Preferring impersonal

government, with its dogmas and definitions, is called Republicanism.

Objecting broadmindedly both to kings and creeds is called Bosh; at

least, I know no more philosophic word for it. You can be guided by the

shrewdness or presence of mind of one ruler, or by the equality and

ascertained justice of one rule; but you must have one or the other, or

you are not a nation, but a nasty mess. Now men in their aspect of

equality and debate adore the idea of rules; they develop and

complicate them greatly to excess. A man finds far more regulations and

definitions in his club, where there are rules, than in his home, where

there is a ruler. A deliberate assembly, the House of Commons, for

instance, carries this mummery to the point of a methodical madness.

The whole system is stiff with rigid unreason; like the Royal Court in

Lewis Carroll. You would think the Speaker would speak; therefore he is

mostly silent. You would think a man would take off his hat to stop and

put it on to go away; therefore he takes off his hat to walk out and

puts in on to stop in. Names are forbidden, and a man must call his own

father "my right honorable friend the member for West Birmingham."

These are, perhaps, fantasies of decay: but fundamentally they answer a

masculine appetite. Men feel that rules, even if irrational, are

universal; men feel that law is equal, even when it is not equitable.

There is a wild fairness in the thing--as there is in tossing up.

Again, it is gravely unfortunate that when critics do attack such cases

as the Commons it is always on the points (perhaps the few points)

where the Commons are right. They denounce the House as the

Talking-Shop, and complain that it wastes time in wordy mazes. Now this

is just one respect in which the Commons are actually like the Common

People. If they love leisure and long debate, it is be cause all men

love it; that they really represent England. There the Parliament does

approach to the virile virtues of the pothouse.

The real truth is that adumbrated in the introductory section when we

spoke of the sense of home and property, as now we speak of the sense

of counsel and community. All men do naturally love the idea of

leisure, laughter, loud and equal argument; but there stands a specter

in our hall. We are conscious of the towering modern challenge that is

called specialism or cut-throat competition--Business. Business will

have nothing to do with leisure; business will have no truck with

comradeship; business will pretend to no patience with all the legal

fictions and fantastic handicaps by which comradeship protects its

egalitarian ideal. The modern millionaire, when engaged in the

agreeable and typical task of sacking his own father, will certainly

not refer to him as the right honorable clerk from the Laburnum Road,

Brixton. Therefore there has arisen in modern life a literary fashion

devoting itself to the romance of business, to great demigods of greed

and to fairyland of finance. This popular philosophy is utterly

despotic and anti-democratic; this fashion is the flower of that

Caesarism against which I am concerned to protest. The ideal

millionaire is strong in the possession of a brain of steel. The fact

that the real millionaire is rather more often strong in the possession

of a head of wood, does not alter the spirit and trend of the idolatry.

The essential argument is "Specialists must be despots; men must be

specialists. You cannot have equality in a soap factory; so you cannot

have it anywhere. You cannot have comradeship in a wheat corner; so you

cannot hare it at all. We must have commercial civilization; therefore

we must destroy democracy." I know that plutocrats hare seldom

sufficient fancy to soar to such examples as soap or wheat. They

generally confine themselves, with fine freshness of mind, to a

comparison between the state and a ship. One anti-democratic writer

remarked that he would not like to sail in a vessel in which the

cabin-boy had an equal vote with the captain. It might easily be urged

in answer that many a ship (the Victoria, for instance) was sunk

because an admiral gave an order which a cabin-boy could see was wrong.

But this is a debating reply; the essential fallacy is both deeper and

simpler. The elementary fact is that we were all born in a state; we

were not all born on a ship; like some of our great British bankers. A

ship still remains a specialist experiment, like a diving-bell or a

flying ship: in such peculiar perils the need for promptitude

constitutes the need for autocracy. But we live and die in the vessel

of the state; and if we cannot find freedom camaraderie and the popular

element in the state, we cannot find it at all. And the modern doctrine

of commercial despotism means that we shall not find it at all. Our

specialist trades in their highly civilized state cannot (it says) be

run without the whole brutal business of bossing and sacking, "too old

at forty" and all the rest of the filth. And they must be run, and

therefore we call on Caesar. Nobody but the Superman could descend to

do such dirty work.

Now (to reiterate my title) this is what is wrong. This is the huge

modern heresy of altering the human soul to fit its conditions, instead

of altering human conditions to fit the human soul. If soap boiling is

really inconsistent with brotherhood, so much the worst for

soap-boiling, not for brotherhood. If civilization really cannot get on

with democracy, so much the worse for civilization, not for democracy.

Certainly, it would be far better to go back to village communes, if

they really are communes. Certainly, it would be better to do without

soap rather than to do without society. Certainly, we would sacrifice

all our wires, wheels, systems, specialties, physical science and

frenzied finance for one half-hour of happiness such as has often come

to us with comrades in a common tavern. I do not say the sacrifice will

be necessary; I only say it will be easy.

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It will be better to adopt in this chapter the same process that

appeared a piece of mental justice in the last. My general opinions on

the feminine question are such as many suffragists would warmly

approve; and it would be easy to state them without any open reference

to the current controversy. But just as it seemed more decent to say

first that I was not in favor of Imperialism even in its practical and

popular sense, so it seems more decent to say the same of Female

Suffrage, in its practical and popular sense. In other words, it is

only fair to state, however hurriedly, the superficial objection to the

Suffragettes before we go on to the really subtle questions behind the

Suffrage.

Well, to get this honest but unpleasant business over, the objection to

the Suffragettes is not that they are Militant Suffragettes. On the

contrary, it is that they are not militant enough. A revolution is a

military thing; it has all the military virtues; one of which is that

it comes to an end. Two parties fight with deadly weapons, but under

certain rules of arbitrary honor; the party that wins becomes the

government and proceeds to govern. The aim of civil war, like the aim

of all war, is peace. Now the Suffragettes cannot raise civil war in

this soldierly and decisive sense; first, because they are women; and,

secondly, because they are very few women. But they can raise something

else; which is altogether another pair of shoes. They do not create

revolution; what they do create is anarchy; and the difference between

these is not a question of violence, but a question of fruitfulness and

finality. Revolution of its nature produces government; anarchy only

produces more anarchy. Men may have what opinions they please about the

beheading of King Charles or King Louis, but they cannot deny that

Bradshaw and Cromwell ruled, that Carnot and Napoleon governed. Someone

conquered; something occurred. You can only knock off the King's head

once. But you can knock off the King's hat any number of times.

Destruction is finite, obstruction is infinite: so long as rebellion

takes the form of mere disorder (instead of an attempt to enforce a new

order) there is no logical end to it; it can feed on itself and renew

itself forever. If Napoleon had not wanted to be a Consul, but only

wanted to be a nuisance, he could, possibly, have prevented any

government arising successfully out of the Revolution. But such a

proceeding would not have deserved the dignified name of rebellion.

It is exactly this unmilitant quality in the Suffragettes that makes

their superficial problem. The problem is that their action has none of

the advantages of ultimate violence; it does not afford a test. War is

a dreadful thing; but it does prove two points sharply and

unanswerably--numbers, and an unnatural valor. One does discover the

two urgent matters; how many rebels there are alive, and how many are

ready to be dead. But a tiny minority, even an interested minority, may

maintain mere disorder forever. There is also, of course, in the case

of these women, the further falsity that is introduced by their sex. It

is false to state the matter as a mere brutal question of strength. If

his muscles give a man a vote, then his horse ought to have two votes

and his elephant five votes. The truth is more subtle than that; it is

that bodily outbreak is a man's instinctive weapon, like the hoofs to

the horse or the tusks to the elephant. All riot is a threat of war;

but the woman is brandishing a weapon she can never use. There are many

weapons that she could and does use. If (for example) all the women

nagged for a vote they would get it in a month. But there again, one

must remember, it would be necessary to get all the women to nag. And

that brings us to the end of the political surface of the matter. The

working objection to the Suffragette philosophy is simply that

overmastering millions of women do not agree with it. I am aware that

some maintain that women ought to have votes whether the majority wants

them or not; but this is surely a strange and childish case of setting

up formal democracy to the destruction of actual democracy. What should

the mass of women decide if they do not decide their general place in

the State? These people practically say that females may vote about

everything except about Female Suffrage. But having again cleared my

conscience of my merely political and possibly unpopular opinion, I

will again cast back and try to treat the matter in a slower and more

sympathetic style; attempt to trace the real roots of woman's position

in the western state, and the causes of our existing traditions or

perhaps prejudices upon the point. And for this purpose it is again

necessary to travel far from the modern topic, the mere Suffragette of

today, and to go back to subjects which, though much more old, are, I

think, considerably more fresh.

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Cast your eye round the room in which you sit, and select some three or

four things that have been with man almost since his beginning; which

at least we hear of early in the centuries and often among the tribes.

Let me suppose that you see a knife on the table, a stick in the

corner, or a fire on the hearth. About each of these you will notice

one speciality; that not one of them is special. Each of these

ancestral things is a universal thing; made to supply many different

needs; and while tottering pedants nose about to find the cause and

origin of some old custom, the truth is that it had fifty causes or a

hundred origins. The knife is meant to cut wood, to cut cheese, to cut

pencils, to cut throats; for a myriad ingenious or innocent human

objects. The stick is meant partly to hold a man up, partly to knock a

man down; partly to point with like a finger-post, partly to balance

with like a balancing pole, partly to trifle with like a cigarette,

partly to kill with like a club of a giant; it is a crutch and a

cudgel; an elongated finger and an extra leg. The case is the same, of

course, with the fire; about which the strangest modern views have

arisen. A queer fancy seems to be current that a fire exists to warm

people. It exists to warm people, to light their darkness, to raise

their spirits, to toast their muffins, to air their rooms, to cook

their chestnuts, to tell stories to their children, to make checkered

shadows on their walls, to boil their hurried kettles, and to be the

red heart of a man's house and that hearth for which, as the great

heathens said, a man should die.

Now it is the great mark of our modernity that people are always

proposing substitutes for these old things; and these substitutes

always answer one purpose where the old thing answered ten. The modern

man will wave a cigarette instead of a stick; he will cut his pencil

with a little screwing pencil-sharpener instead of a knife; and he will

even boldly offer to be warmed by hot water pipes instead of a fire. I

have my doubts about pencil-sharpeners even for sharpening pencils; and

about hot water pipes even for heat. But when we think of all those

other requirements that these institutions answered, there opens before

us the whole horrible harlequinade of our civilization. We see as in a

vision a world where a man tries to cut his throat with a

pencil-sharpener; where a man must learn single-stick with a cigarette;

where a man must try to toast muffins at electric lamps, and see red

and golden castles in the surface of hot water pipes.

The principle of which I speak can be seen everywhere in a comparison

between the ancient and universal things and the modern and specialist

things. The object of a theodolite is to lie level; the object of a

stick is to swing loose at any angle; to whirl like the very wheel of

liberty. The object of a lancet is to lance; when used for slashing,

gashing, ripping, lopping off heads and limbs, it is a disappointing

instrument. The object of an electric light is merely to light (a

despicable modesty); and the object of an asbestos stove . . . I wonder

what is the object of an asbestos stove? If a man found a coil of rope

in a desert he could at least think of all the things that can be done

with a coil of rope; and some of them might even be practical. He could

tow a boat or lasso a horse. He could play cat's-cradle, or pick oakum.

He could construct a rope-ladder for an eloping heiress, or cord her

boxes for a travelling maiden aunt. He could learn to tie a bow, or he

could hang himself. Far otherwise with the unfortunate traveller who

should find a telephone in the desert. You can telephone with a

telephone; you cannot do anything else with it. And though this is one

of the wildest joys of life, it falls by one degree from its full

delirium when there is nobody to answer you. The contention is, in

brief, that you must pull up a hundred roots, and not one, before you

uproot any of these hoary and simple expedients. It is only with great

difficulty that a modem scientific sociologist can be got to see that

any old method has a leg to stand on. But almost every old method has

four or five legs to stand on. Almost all the old institutions are

quadrupeds; and some of them are centipedes.

Consider these cases, old and new, and you will observe the operation

of a general tendency. Everywhere there was one big thing that served

six purposes; everywhere now there are six small things; or, rather

(and there is the trouble), there are just five and a half.

Nevertheless, we will not say that this separation and specialism is

entirely useless or inexcusable. I have often thanked God for the

telephone; I may any day thank God for the lancet; and there is none of

these brilliant and narrow inventions (except, of course, the asbestos

stove) which might not be at some moment necessary and lovely. But I do

not think the most austere upholder of specialism will deny that there

is in these old, many-sided institutions an element of unity and

universality which may well be preserved in its due proportion and

place. Spiritually, at least, it will be admitted that some all-round

balance is needed to equalize the extravagance of experts. It would not

be difficult to carry the parable of the knife and stick into higher

regions. Religion, the immortal maiden, has been a maid-of-all-work as

well as a servant of mankind. She provided men at once with the

theoretic laws of an unalterable cosmos and also with the practical

rules of the rapid and thrilling game of morality. She taught logic to

the student and told fairy tales to the children; it was her business

to confront the nameless gods whose fears are on all flesh, and also to

see the streets were spotted with silver and scarlet, that there was a

day for wearing ribbons or an hour for ringing bells. The large uses of

religion have been broken up into lesser specialities, just as the uses

of the hearth have been broken up into hot water pipes and electric

bulbs. The romance of ritual and colored emblem has been taken over by

that narrowest of all trades, modem art (the sort called art for art's

sake), and men are in modern practice informed that they may use all

symbols so long as they mean nothing by them. The romance of conscience

has been dried up into the science of ethics; which may well be called

decency for decency's sake, decency unborn of cosmic energies and

barren of artistic flower. The cry to the dim gods, cut off from ethics

and cosmology, has become mere Psychical Research. Everything has been

sundered from everything else, and everything has grown cold. Soon we

shall hear of specialists dividing the tune from the words of a song,

on the ground that they spoil each other; and I did once meet a man who

openly advocated the separation of almonds and raisins. This world is

all one wild divorce court; nevertheless, there are many who still hear

in their souls the thunder of authority of human habit; those whom Man

hath joined let no man sunder.

This book must avoid religion, but there must (I say) be many,

religious and irreligious, who will concede that this power of

answering many purposes was a sort of strength which should not wholly

die out of our lives. As a part of personal character, even the moderns

will agree that many-sidedness is a merit and a merit that may easily

be overlooked. This balance and universality has been the vision of

many groups of men in many ages. It was the Liberal Education of

Aristotle; the jack-of-all-trades artistry of Leonardo da Vinci and his

friends; the august amateurishness of the Cavalier Person of Quality

like Sir William Temple or the great Earl of Dorset. It has appeared in

literature in our time in the most erratic and opposite shapes, set to

almost inaudible music by Walter Pater and enunciated through a foghorn

by Walt Whitman. But the great mass of men have always been unable to

achieve this literal universality, because of the nature of their work

in the world. Not, let it be noted, because of the existence of their

work. Leonardo da Vinci must have worked pretty hard; on the other

hand, many a government office clerk, village constable or elusive

plumber may do (to all human appearance) no work at all, and yet show

no signs of the Aristotelian universalism. What makes it difficult for

the average man to be a universalist is that the average man has to be

a specialist; he has not only to learn one trade, but to learn it so

well as to uphold him in a more or less ruthless society. This is

generally true of males from the first hunter to the last electrical

engineer; each has not merely to act, but to excel. Nimrod has not only

to be a mighty hunter before the Lord, but also a mighty hunter before

the other hunters. The electrical engineer has to be a very electrical

engineer, or he is outstripped by engineers yet more electrical. Those

very miracles of the human mind on which the modern world prides

itself, and rightly in the main, would be impossible without a certain

concentration which disturbs the pure balance of reason more than does

religious bigotry. No creed can be so limiting as that awful adjuration

that the cobbler must not go beyond his last. So the largest and

wildest shots of our world are but in one direction and with a defined

trajectory: the gunner cannot go beyond his shot, and his shot so often

falls short; the astronomer cannot go beyond his telescope and his

telescope goes such a little way. All these are like men who have stood

on the high peak of a mountain and seen the horizon like a single ring

and who then descend down different paths towards different towns,

traveling slow or fast. It is right; there must be people traveling to

different towns; there must be specialists; but shall no one behold the

horizon? Shall all mankind be specialist surgeons or peculiar plumbers;

shall all humanity be monomaniac? Tradition has decided that only half

of humanity shall be monomaniac. It has decided that in every home

there shall be a tradesman and a Jack-of all-trades. But it has also

decided, among other things, that the Jack of-all-trades shall be a

Gill-of-all-trades. It has decided, rightly or wrongly, that this

specialism and this universalism shall be divided between the sexes.

Cleverness shall be left for men and wisdom for women. For cleverness

kills wisdom; that is one of the few sad and certain things.

But for women this ideal of comprehensive capacity (or common-sense)

must long ago have been washed away. It must have melted in the

frightful furnaces of ambition and eager technicality. A man must be

partly a one-idead man, because he is a one-weaponed man--and he is

flung naked into the fight. The world's demand comes to him direct; to

his wife indirectly. In short, he must (as the books on Success say)

give "his best"; and what a small part of a man "his best" is! His

second and third best are often much better. If he is the first violin

he must fiddle for life; he must not remember that he is a fine fourth

bagpipe, a fair fifteenth billiard-cue, a foil, a fountain pen, a hand

at whist, a gun, and an image of God.

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And it should be remarked in passing that this force upon a man to

develop one feature has nothing to do with what is commonly called our

competitive system, but would equally exist under any rationally

conceivable kind of Collectivism. Unless the Socialists are frankly

ready for a fall in the standard of violins, telescopes and electric

lights, they must somehow create a moral demand on the individual that

he shall keep up his present concentration on these things. It was only

by men being in some degree specialist that there ever were any

telescopes; they must certainly be in some degree specialist in order

to keep them going. It is not by making a man a State wage-earner that

you can prevent him thinking principally about the very difficult way

he earns his wages. There is only one way to preserve in the world that

high levity and that more leisurely outlook which fulfils the old

vision of universalism. That is, to permit the existence of a partly

protected half of humanity; a half which the harassing industrial

demand troubles indeed, but only troubles indirectly. In other words,

there must be in every center of humanity one human being upon a larger

plan; one who does not "give her best," but gives her all.

Our old analogy of the fire remains the most workable one. The fire

need not blaze like electricity nor boil like boiling water; its point

is that it blazes more than water and warms more than light. The wife

is like the fire, or to put things in their proper proportion, the fire

is like the wife. Like the fire, the woman is expected to cook: not to

excel in cooking, but to cook; to cook better than her husband who is

earning the coke by lecturing on botany or breaking stones. Like the

fire, the woman is expected to tell tales to the children, not original

and artistic tales, but tales-- better tales than would probably be

told by a first-class cook. Like the fire, the woman is expected to

illuminate and ventilate, not by the most startling revelations or the

wildest winds of thought, but better than a man can do it after

breaking stones or lecturing. But she cannot be expected to endure

anything like this universal duty if she is also to endure the direct

cruelty of competitive or bureaucratic toil. Woman must be a cook, but

not a competitive cook; a school mistress, but not a competitive

schoolmistress; a house-decorator but not a competitive

house-decorator; a dressmaker, but not a competitive dressmaker. She

should have not one trade but twenty hobbies; she, unlike the man, may

develop all her second bests. This is what has been really aimed at

from the first in what is called the seclusion, or even the oppression,

of women. Women were not kept at home in order to keep them narrow; on

the contrary, they were kept at home in order to keep them broad. The

world outside the home was one mass of narrowness, a maze of cramped

paths, a madhouse of monomaniacs. It was only by partly limiting and

protecting the woman that she was enabled to play at five or six

professions and so come almost as near to God as the child when he

plays at a hundred trades. But the woman's professions, unlike the

child's, were all truly and almost terribly fruitful; so tragically

real that nothing but her universality and balance prevented them being

merely morbid. This is the substance of the contention I offer about

the historic female position. I do not deny that women have been

wronged and even tortured; but I doubt if they were ever tortured so

much as they are tortured now by the absurd modern attempt to make them

domestic empresses and competitive clerks at the same time. I do not

deny that even under the old tradition women had a harder time than

men; that is why we take off our hats. I do not deny that all these

various female functions were exasperating; but I say that there was

some aim and meaning in keeping them various. I do not pause even to

deny that woman was a servant; but at least she was a general servant.

The shortest way of summarizing the position is to say that woman

stands for the idea of Sanity; that intellectual home to which the mind

must return after every excursion on extravagance. The mind that finds

its way to wild places is the poet's; but the mind that never finds its

way back is the lunatic's. There must in every machine be a part that

moves and a part that stands still; there must be in everything that

changes a part that is unchangeable. And many of the phenomena which

moderns hastily condemn are really parts of this position of the woman

as the center and pillar of health. Much of what is called her

subservience, and even her pliability, is merely the subservience and

pliability of a universal remedy; she varies as medicines vary, with

the disease. She has to be an optimist to the morbid husband, a

salutary pessimist to the happy-go-lucky husband. She has to prevent

the Quixote from being put upon, and the bully from putting upon

others. The French King wrote--

"Toujours femme varie Bien fol qui s'y fie," but the truth is that

woman always varies, and that is exactly why we always trust her. To

correct every adventure and extravagance with its antidote in

common-sense is not (as the moderns seem to think) to be in the

position of a spy or a slave. It is to be in the position of Aristotle

or (at the lowest) Herbert Spencer, to be a universal morality, a

complete system of thought. The slave flatters; the complete moralist

rebukes. It is, in short, to be a Trimmer in the true sense of that

honorable term; which for some reason or other is always used in a

sense exactly opposite to its own. It seems really to be supposed that

a Trimmer means a cowardly person who always goes over to the stronger

side. It really means a highly chivalrous person who always goes over

to the weaker side; like one who trims a boat by sitting where there

are few people seated. Woman is a trimmer; and it is a generous,

dangerous and romantic trade.

The final fact which fixes this is a sufficiently plain one. Supposing

it to be conceded that humanity has acted at least not unnaturally in

dividing itself into two halves, respectively typifying the ideals of

special talent and of general sanity (since they are genuinely

difficult to combine completely in one mind), it is not difficult to

see why the line of cleavage has followed the line of sex, or why the

female became the emblem of the universal and the male of the special

and superior. Two gigantic facts of nature fixed it thus: first, that

the woman who frequently fulfilled her functions literally could not be

specially prominent in experiment and adventure; and second, that the

same natural operation surrounded her with very young children, who

require to be taught not so much anything as everything. Babies need

not to be taught a trade, but to be introduced to a world. To put the

matter shortly, woman is generally shut up in a house with a human

being at the time when he asks all the questions that there are, and

some that there aren't. It would be odd if she retained any of the

narrowness of a specialist. Now if anyone says that this duty of

general enlightenment (even when freed from modern rules and hours, and

exercised more spontaneously by a more protected person) is in itself

too exacting and oppressive, I can understand the view. I can only

answer that our race has thought it worth while to cast this burden on

women in order to keep common-sense in the world. But when people begin

to talk about this domestic duty as not merely difficult but trivial

and dreary, I simply give up the question. For I cannot with the utmost

energy of imagination conceive what they mean. When domesticity, for

instance, is called drudgery, all the difficulty arises from a double

meaning in the word. If drudgery only means dreadfully hard work, I

admit the woman drudges in the home, as a man might drudge at the

Cathedral of Amiens or drudge behind a gun at Trafalgar. But if it

means that the hard work is more heavy because it is trifling,

colorless and of small import to the soul, then as I say, I give it up;

I do not know what the words mean. To be Queen Elizabeth within a

definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labors and holidays; to be

Whiteley within a certain area, providing toys, boots, sheets cakes.

and books, to be Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals,

manners, theology, and hygiene; I can understand how this might exhaust

the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it. How can it be a

large career to tell other people's children about the Rule of Three,

and a small career to tell one's own children about the universe? How

can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone, and narrow to be

everything to someone? No; a woman's function is laborious, but because

it is gigantic, not because it is minute I will pity Mrs. Jones for the

hugeness of her task; I will never pity her for its smallness.

But though the essential of the woman's task is universality, this does

not, of course, prevent her from having one or two severe though

largely wholesome prejudices. She has, on the whole, been more

conscious than man that she is only one half of humanity; but she has

expressed it (if one may say so of a lady) by getting her teeth into

the two or three things which she thinks she stands for. I would

observe here in parenthesis that much of the recent official trouble

about women has arisen from the fact that they transfer to things of

doubt and reason that sacred stubbornness only proper to the primary

things which a woman was set to guard. One's own children, one's own

altar, ought to be a matter of principle-- or if you like, a matter of

prejudice. On the other hand, who wrote Junius's Letters ought not to

be a principle or a prejudice, it ought to be a matter of free and

almost indifferent inquiry. But take an energetic modern girl secretary

to a league to show that George III wrote Junius, and in three months

she will believe it, too, out of mere loyalty to her employers. Modern

women defend their office with all the fierceness of domesticity. They

fight for desk and typewriter as for hearth and home, and develop a

sort of wolfish wifehood on behalf of the invisible head of the firm.

That is why they do office work so well; and that is why they ought not

to do it.

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The larger part of womankind, however, have had to fight for things

slightly more intoxicating to the eye than the desk or the typewriter;

and it cannot be denied that in defending these, women have developed

the quality called prejudice to a powerful and even menacing degree.

But these prejudices will always be found to fortify the main position

of the woman, that she is to remain a general overseer, an autocrat

within small compass but on all sides. On the one or two points on

which she really misunderstands the man's position, it is almost

entirely in order to preserve her own. The two points on which woman,

actually and of herself, is most tenacious may be roughly summarized as

the ideal of thrift and the ideal of dignity

Unfortunately for this book it is written by a male, and these two

qualities, if not hateful to a man, are at least hateful in a man. But

if we are to settle the sex question at all fairly, all males must make

an imaginative attempt to enter into the attitude of all good women

toward these two things. The difficulty exists especially, perhaps, in

the thing called thrift; we men have so much encouraged each other in

throwing money right and left, that there has come at last to be a sort

of chivalrous and poetical air about losing sixpence. But on a broader

and more candid consideration the case scarcely stands so.

Thrift is the really romantic thing; economy is more romantic than

extravagance. Heaven knows I for one speak disinterestedly in the

matter; for I cannot clearly remember saving a half-penny ever since I

was born. But the thing is true; economy, properly understood, is the

more poetic. Thrift is poetic because it is creative; waste is unpoetic

because it is waste. It is prosaic to throw money away, because it is

prosaic to throw anything away; it is negative; it is a confession of

indifference, that is, it is a confession of failure. The most prosaic

thing about the house is the dustbin, and the one great objection to

the new fastidious and aesthetic homestead is simply that in such a

moral menage the dustbin must be bigger than the house. If a man could

undertake to make use of all things in his dustbin he would be a

broader genius than Shakespeare. When science began to use by-products;

when science found that colors could be made out of coaltar, she made

her greatest and perhaps her only claim on the real respect of the

human soul. Now the aim of the good woman is to use the by-products,

or, in other words, to rummage in the dustbin.

A man can only fully comprehend it if he thinks of some sudden joke or

expedient got up with such materials as may be found in a private house

on a rainy day. A man's definite daily work is generally run with such

rigid convenience of modern science that thrift, the picking up of

potential helps here and there, has almost become unmeaning to him. He

comes across it most (as I say) when he is playing some game within

four walls; when in charades, a hearthrug will just do for a fur coat,

or a tea-cozy just do for a cocked hat; when a toy theater needs timber

and cardboard, and the house has just enough firewood and just enough

bandboxes. This is the man's occasional glimpse and pleasing parody of

thrift. But many a good housekeeper plays the same game every day with

ends of cheese and scraps of silk, not because she is mean, but on the

contrary, because she is magnanimous; because she wishes her creative

mercy to be over all her works, that not one sardine should be

destroyed, or cast as rubbish to the void, when she has made the pile

complete.

The modern world must somehow be made to understand (in theology and

other things) that a view may be vast, broad, universal, liberal and

yet come into conflict with another view that is vast, broad, universal

and liberal also. There is never a war between two sects, but only

between two universal Catholic Churches. The only possible collision is

the collision of one cosmos with another. So in a smaller way it must

be first made clear that this female economic ideal is a part of that

female variety of outlook and all-round art of life which we have

already attributed to the sex: thrift is not a small or timid or

provincial thing; it is part of that great idea of the woman watching

on all sides out of all the windows of the soul and being answerable

for everything. For in the average human house there is one hole by

which money comes in and a hundred by which it goes out; man has to do

with the one hole, woman with the hundred. But though the very

stinginess of a woman is a part of her spiritual breadth, it is none

the less true that it brings her into conflict with the special kind of

spiritual breadth that belongs to the males of the tribe. It brings her

into conflict with that shapeless cataract of Comradeship, of chaotic

feasting and deafening debate, which we noted in the last section. The

very touch of the eternal in the two sexual tastes brings them the more

into antagonism; for one stands for a universal vigilance and the other

for an almost infinite output. Partly through the nature of his moral

weakness, and partly through the nature or his physical strength, the

male is normally prone to expand things into a sort of eternity; he

always thinks of a dinner party as lasting all night; and he always

thinks of a night as lasting forever. When the working women in the

poor districts come to the doors of the public houses and try to get

their husbands home, simple minded "social workers" always imagine that

every husband is a tragic drunkard and every wife a broken-hearted

saint. It never occurs to them that the poor woman is only doing under

coarser conventions exactly what every fashionable hostess does when

she tries to get the men from arguing over the cigars to come and

gossip over the teacups. These women are not exasperated merely at the

amount of money that is wasted in beer; they are exasperated also at

the amount of time that is wasted in talk. It is not merely what goeth

into the mouth but what cometh out the mouth that, in their opinion,

defileth a man. They will raise against an argument (like their sisters

of all ranks) the ridiculous objection that nobody is convinced by it;

as if a man wanted to make a body-slave of anybody with whom he had

played single-stick. But the real female prejudice on this point is not

without a basis; the real feeling is this, that the most masculine

pleasures have a quality of the ephemeral. A duchess may ruin a duke

for a diamond necklace; but there is the necklace. A coster may ruin

his wife for a pot of beer; and where is the beer? The duchess quarrels

with another duchess in order to crush her, to produce a result; the

coster does not argue with another coster in order to convince him, but

in order to enjoy at once the sound of his own voice, the clearness of

his own opinions and the sense of masculine society. There is this

element of a fine fruitlessness about the male enjoyments; wine is

poured into a bottomless bucket; thought plunges into a bottomless

abyss. All this has set woman against the Public House--that is,

against the Parliament House. She is there to prevent waste; and the

"pub" and the parliament are the very palaces of waste. In the upper

classes the "pub" is called the club, but that makes no more difference

to the reason than it does to the rhyme. High and low, the woman's

objection to the Public House is perfectly definite and rational, it is

that the Public House wastes the energies that could be used on the

private house.

As it is about feminine thrift against masculine waste, so it is about

feminine dignity against masculine rowdiness. The woman has a fixed and

very well-founded idea that if she does not insist on good manners

nobody else will. Babies are not always strong on the point of dignity,

and grown-up men are quite unpresentable. It is true that there are

many very polite men, but none that I ever heard of who were not either

fascinating women or obeying them. But indeed the female ideal of

dignity, like the female ideal of thrift, lies deeper and may easily be

misunderstood. It rests ultimately on a strong idea of spiritual

isolation; the same that makes women religious. They do not like being

melted down; they dislike and avoid the mob That anonymous quality we

have remarked in the club conversation would be common impertinence in

a case of ladies. I remember an artistic and eager lady asking me in

her grand green drawing-room whether I believed in comradeship between

the sexes, and why not. I was driven back on offering the obvious and

sincere answer "Because if I were to treat you for two minutes like a

comrade you would turn me out of the house." The only certain rule on

this subject is always to deal with woman and never with women. "Women"

is a profligate word; I have used it repeatedly in this chapter; but it

always has a blackguard sound. It smells of oriental cynicism and

hedonism. Every woman is a captive queen. But every crowd of women is

only a harem broken loose.

I am not expressing my own views here, but those of nearly all the

women I have known. It is quite unfair to say that a woman hates other

women individually; but I think it would be quite true to say that she

detests them in a confused heap. And this is not because she despises

her own sex, but because she respects it; and respects especially that

sanctity and separation of each item which is represented in manners by

the idea of dignity and in morals by the idea of chastity.

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We hear much of the human error which accepts what is sham and what is

real. But it is worth while to remember that with unfamiliar things we

often mistake what is real for what is sham. It is true that a very

young man may think the wig of an actress is her hair. But it is

equally true that a child yet younger may call the hair of a negro his

wig. Just because the woolly savage is remote and barbaric he seems to

be unnaturally neat and tidy. Everyone must have noticed the same thing

in the fixed and almost offensive color of all unfamiliar things,

tropic birds and tropic blossoms. Tropic birds look like staring toys

out of a toy-shop. Tropic flowers simply look like artificial flowers,

like things cut out of wax. This is a deep matter, and, I think, not

unconnected with divinity; but anyhow it is the truth that when we see

things for the first time we feel instantly that they are fictive

creations; we feel the finger of God. It is only when we are thoroughly

used to them and our five wits are wearied, that we see them as wild

and objectless; like the shapeless tree-tops or the shifting cloud. It

is the design in Nature that strikes us first; the sense of the crosses

and confusions in that design only comes afterwards through experience

and an almost eerie monotony. If a man saw the stars abruptly by

accident he would think them as festive and as artificial as a

firework. We talk of the folly of painting the lily; but if we saw the

lily without warning we should think that it was painted. We talk of

the devil not being so black as he is painted; but that very phrase is

a testimony to the kinship between what is called vivid and what is

called artificial. If the modern sage had only one glimpse of grass and

sky, he would say that grass was not as green as it was painted; that

sky was not as blue as it was painted. If one could see the whole

universe suddenly, it would look like a bright-colored toy, just as the

South American hornbill looks like a bright-colored toy. And so they

are--both of them, I mean.

But it was not with this aspect of the startling air of artifice about

all strange objects that I meant to deal. I mean merely, as a guide to

history, that we should not be surprised if things wrought in fashions

remote from ours seem artificial; we should convince ourselves that

nine times out of ten these things are nakedly and almost indecently

honest. You will hear men talk of the frosted classicism of Corneille

or of the powdered pomposities of the eighteenth century, but all these

phrases are very superficial. There never was an artificial epoch.

There never was an age of reason. Men were always men and women women:

and their two generous appetites always were the expression of passion

and the telling of truth. We can see something stiff and quaint in

their mode of expression, just as our descendants will see something

stiff and quaint in our coarsest slum sketch or our most naked

pathological play. But men have never talked about anything but

important things; and the next force in femininity which we have to

consider can be considered best perhaps in some dusty old volume of

verses by a person of quality.

The eighteenth century is spoken of as the period of artificiality, in

externals at least; but, indeed, there may be two words about that. In

modern speech one uses artificiality as meaning indefinitely a sort of

deceit; and the eighteenth century was far too artificial to deceive.

It cultivated that completest art that does not conceal the art. Its

fashions and costumes positively revealed nature by allowing artifice;

as in that obvious instance of a barbering that frosted every head with

the same silver. It would be fantastic to call this a quaint humility

that concealed youth; but, at least, it was not one with the evil pride

that conceals old age. Under the eighteenth century fashion people did

not so much all pretend to be young, as all agree to be old. The same

applies to the most odd and unnatural of their fashions; they were

freakish, but they were not false. A lady may or may not be as red as

she is painted, but plainly she was not so black as she was patched.

But I only introduce the reader into this atmosphere of the older and

franker fictions that he may be induced to have patience for a moment

with a certain element which is very common in the decoration and

literature of that age and of the two centuries preceding it. It is

necessary to mention it in such a connection because it is exactly one

of those things that look as superficial as powder, and are really as

rooted as hair.

In all the old flowery and pastoral love-songs, those of the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries especially, you will find a

perpetual reproach against woman in the matter of her coldness;

ceaseless an stale similes that compare her eyes to northern stars, her

heart to ice, or her bosom to snow. Now most of us have always supposed

these old and iterant phrases to be a mere pattern of dead words, a

thing like a cold wall-paper. Yet I think those old cavalier poets who

wrote about the coldness of Chloe had hold of a psychological truth

missed in nearly all the realistic novels of today. Our psychological

romancers perpetually represent wives as striking terror into their

husbands by rolling on the floor, gnashing their teeth, throwing about

the furniture or poisoning the coffee; all this upon some strange fixed

theory that women are what they call emotional. But in truth the old

and frigid form is much nearer to the vital fact. Most men if they

spoke with any sincerity would agree that the most terrible quality in

women, whether in friendship, courtship or marriage, was not so much

being emotional as being unemotional.

There is an awful armor of ice which may be the legitimate protection

of a more delicate organism; but whatever be the psychological

explanation there can surely be no question of the fact. The

instinctive cry of the female in anger is noli me tangere. I take this

as the most obvious and at the same time the least hackneyed instance

of a fundamental quality in the female tradition, which has tended in

our time to be almost immeasurably misunderstood, both by the cant of

moralists and the cant of immoralists. The proper name for the thing is

modesty; but as we live in an age of prejudice and must not call things

by their right names, we will yield to a more modern nomenclature and

call it dignity. Whatever else it is, it is the thing which a thousand

poets and a million lovers have called the coldness of Chloe. It is

akin to the classical, and is at least the opposite of the grotesque.

And since we are talking here chiefly in types and symbols, perhaps as

good an embodiment as any of the idea may be found in the mere fact of

a woman wearing a skirt. It is highly typical of the rabid plagiarism

which now passes everywhere for emancipation, that a little while ago

it was common for an "advanced" woman to claim the right to wear

trousers; a right about as grotesque as the right to wear a false nose.

Whether female liberty is much advanced by the act of wearing a skirt

on each leg I do not know; perhaps Turkish women might offer some

information on the point. But if the western woman walks about (as it

were) trailing the curtains of the harem with her, it is quite certain

that the woven mansion is meant for a perambulating palace, not for a

perambulating prison. It is quite certain that the skirt rneans female

dignity, not female submission; it can be proved by the simplest of all

tests. No ruler would deliberately dress up in the recognized fetters

of a slave; no judge would appear covered with broad arrows. But when

men wish to be safely impressive, as judges, priests or kings, they do

wear skirts, the long, trailing robes of female dignity The whole world

is under petticoat government; for even men wear petticoats when they

wish to govern.

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We say then that the female holds up with two strong arms these two

pillars of civilization; we say also that she could do neither, but for

her position; her curious position of private omnipotence, universality

on a small scale. The first element is thrift; not the destructive

thrift of the miser, but the creative thrift of the peasant; the second

element is dignity, which is but the expression of sacred personality

and privacy. Now I know the question that will be abruptly and

automatically asked by all that know the dull tricks and turns of the

modern sexual quarrel. The advanced person will at once begin to argue

about whether these instincts are inherent and inevitable in woman or

whether they are merely prejudices produced by her history and

education. Now I do not propose to discuss whether woman could now be

educated out of her habits touching thrift and dignity; and that for

two excellent reasons. First it is a question which cannot conceivably

ever find any answer: that is why modern people are so fond of it. From

the nature of the case it is obviously impossible to decide whether any

of the peculiarities of civilized man have been strictly necessary to

his civilization. It is not self-evident (for instance), that even the

habit of standing upright was the only path of human progress. There

might have been a quadrupedal civilization, in which a city gentleman

put on four boots to go to the city every morning. Or there might have

been a reptilian civilization, in which he rolled up to the office on

his stomach; it is impossible to say that intelligence might not have

developed in such creatures. All we can say is that man as he is walks

upright; and that woman is something almost more upright than

uprightness.

And the second point is this: that upon the whole we rather prefer

women (nay, even men) to walk upright; so we do not waste much of our

noble lives in inventing any other way for them to walk. In short, my

second reason for not speculating upon whether woman might get rid of

these peculiarities, is that I do not want her to get rid of them; nor

does she. I will not exhaust my intelligence by inventing ways in which

mankind might unlearn the violin or forget how to ride horses; and the

art of domesticity seems to me as special and as valuable as all the

ancient arts of our race. Nor do I propose to enter at all into those

formless and floundering speculations about how woman was or is

regarded in the primitive times that we cannot remember, or in the

savage countries which we cannot understand. Even if these people

segregated their women for low or barbaric reasons it would not make

our reasons barbaric; and I am haunted with a tenacious suspicion that

these people's feelings were really, under other forms, very much the

same as ours. Some impatient trader, some superficial missionary, walks

across an island and sees the squaw digging in the fields while the man

is playing a flute; and immediately says that the man is a mere lord of

creation and the woman a mere serf. He does not remember that he might

see the same thing in half the back gardens in Brixton, merely because

women are at once more conscientious and more impatient, while men are

at once more quiescent and more greedy for pleasure. It may often be in

Hawaii simply as it is in Hoxton. That is, the woman does not work

because the man tells her to work and she obeys. On the contrary, the

woman works because she has told the man to work and he hasn't obeyed.

I do not affirm that this is the whole truth, but I do affirm that we

have too little comprehension of the souls of savages to know how far

it is untrue. It is the same with the relations of our hasty and

surface science, with the problem of sexual dignity and modesty.

Professors find all over the world fragmentary ceremonies in which the

bride affects some sort of reluctance, hides from her husband, or runs

away from him. The professor then pompously proclaims that this is a

survival of Marriage by Capture. I wonder he never says that the veil

thrown over the bride is really a net. I gravely doubt whether women

ever were married by capture I think they pretended to be; as they do

still.

It is equally obvious that these two necessary sanctities of thrift and

dignity are bound to come into collision with the wordiness, the

wastefulness, and the perpetual pleasure-seeking of masculine

companionship. Wise women allow for the thing; foolish women try to

crush it; but all women try to counteract it, and they do well. In many

a home all round us at this moment, we know that the nursery rhyme is

reversed. The queen is in the counting-house, counting out the money.

The king is in the parlor, eating bread and honey. But it must be

strictly understood that the king has captured the honey in some heroic

wars. The quarrel can be found in moldering Gothic carvings and in

crabbed Greek manuscripts. In every age, in every land, in every tribe

and village, has been waged the great sexual war between the Private

House and the Public House. I have seen a collection of mediaeval

English poems, divided into sections such as "Religious Carols,"

"Drinking Songs," and so on; and the section headed, "Poems of Domestic

Life" consisted entirely (literally, entirely) of the complaints of

husbands who were bullied by their wives. Though the English was

archaic, the words were in many cases precisely the same as those which

I have heard in the streets and public houses of Battersea, protests on

behalf of an extension of time and talk, protests against the nervous

impatience and the devouring utilitarianism of the female. Such, I say,

is the quarrel; it can never be anything but a quarrel; but the aim of

all morals and all society is to keep it a lovers' quarrel.

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But in this corner called England, at this end of the century, there

has happened a strange and startling thing. Openly and to all

appearance, this ancestral conflict has silently and abruptly ended;

one of the two sexes has suddenly surrendered to the other. By the

beginning of the twentieth century, within the last few years, the

woman has in public surrendered to the man. She has seriously and

officially owned that the man has been right all along; that the public

house (or Parliament) is really more important than the private house;

that politics are not (as woman had always maintained) an excuse for

pots of beer, but are a sacred solemnity to which new female worshipers

may kneel; that the talkative patriots in the tavern are not only

admirable but enviable; that talk is not a waste of time, and therefore

(as a consequence, surely) that taverns are not a waste of money. All

we men had grown used to our wives and mothers, and grandmothers, and

great aunts all pouring a chorus of contempt upon our hobbies of sport,

drink and party politics. And now comes Miss Pankhurst with tears in

her eyes, owning that all the women were wrong and all the men were

right; humbly imploring to be admitted into so much as an outer court,

from which she may catch a glimpse of those masculine merits which her

erring sisters had so thoughtlessly scorned.

Now this development naturally perturbs and even paralyzes us. Males,

like females, in the course of that old fight between the public and

private house, had indulged in overstatement and extravagance, feeling

that they must keep up their end of the see-saw. We told our wives that

Parliament had sat late on most essential business; but it never

crossed our minds that our wives would believe it. We said that

everyone must have a vote in the country; similarly our wives said that

no one must have a pipe in the drawing room. In both cases the idea was

the same. "It does not matter much, but if you let those things slide

there is chaos." We said that Lord Huggins or Mr. Buggins was

absolutely necessary to the country. We knew quite well that nothing is

necessary to the country except that the men should be men and the

women women. We knew this; we thought the women knew it even more

clearly; and we thought the women would say it. Suddenly, without

warning, the women have begun to say all the nonsense that we ourselves

hardly believed when we said it. The solemnity of politics; the

necessity of votes; the necessity of Huggins; the necessity of Buggins;

all these flow in a pellucid stream from the lips of all the

suffragette speakers. I suppose in every fight, however old, one has a

vague aspiration to conquer; but we never wanted to conquer women so

completely as this. We only expected that they might leave us a little

more margin for our nonsense; we never expected that they would accept

it seriously as sense. Therefore I am all at sea about the existing

situation; I scarcely know whether to be relieved or enraged by this

substitution of the feeble platform lecture for the forcible

curtain-lecture. I am lost without the trenchant and candid Mrs.

Caudle. I really do not know what to do with the prostrate and penitent

Miss Pankhurst. This surrender of the modem woman has taken us all so

much by surprise that it is desirable to pause a moment, and collect

our wits about what she is really saying.

As I have already remarked, there is one very simple answer to all

this; these are not the modern women, but about one in two thousand of

the modern women. This fact is important to a democrat; but it is of

very little importance to the typically modern mind. Both the

characteristic modern parties believed in a government by the few; the

only difference is whether it is the Conservative few or Progressive

few. It might be put, somewhat coarsely perhaps, by saying that one

believes in any minority that is rich and the other in any minority

that is mad. But in this state of things the democratic argument

obviously falls out for the moment; and we are bound to take the

prominent minority, merely because it is prominent. Let us eliminate

altogether from our minds the thousands of women who detest this cause,

and the millions of women who have hardly heard of it. Let us concede

that the English people itself is not and will not be for a very long

time within the sphere of practical politics. Let us confine ourselves

to saying that these particular women want a vote and to asking

themselves what a vote is. If we ask these ladies ourselves what a vote

is, we shall get a very vague reply. It is the only question, as a

rule, for which they are not prepared. For the truth is that they go

mainly by precedent; by the mere fact that men have votes already. So

far from being a mutinous movement, it is really a very Conservative

one; it is in the narrowest rut of the British Constitution. Let us

take a little wider and freer sweep of thought and ask ourselves what

is the ultimate point and meaning of this odd business called voting.

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Seemingly from the dawn of man all nations have had governments; and

all nations have been ashamed of them. Nothing is more openly

fallacious than to fancy that in ruder or simpler ages ruling, judging

and punishing appeared perfectly innocent and dignified. These things

were always regarded as the penalties of the Fall; as part of the

humiliation of mankind, as bad in themselves. That the king can do no

wrong was never anything but a legal fiction; and it is a legal fiction

still. The doctrine of Divine Right was not a piece of idealism, but

rather a piece of realism, a practical way of ruling amid the ruin of

humanity; a very pragmatist piece of faith. The religious basis of

government was not so much that people put their trust in princes, as

that they did not put their trust in any child of man. It was so with

all the ugly institutions which disfigure human history. Torture and

slavery were never talked of as good things; they were always talked of

as necessary evils. A pagan spoke of one man owning ten slaves just as

a modern business man speaks of one merchant sacking ten clerks: "It's

very horrible; but how else can society be conducted?" A mediaeval

scholastic regarded the possibility of a man being burned to death just

as a modern business man regards the possibility of a man being starved

to death: "It is a shocking torture; but can you organize a painless

world?" It is possible that a future society may find a way of doing

without the question by hunger as we have done without the question by

fire. It is equally possible, for the matter of that, that a future

society may reestablish legal torture with the whole apparatus of rack

and fagot. The most modern of countries, America, has introduced with a

vague savor of science, a method which it calls "the third degree."

This is simply the extortion of secrets by nervous fatigue; which is

surely uncommonly close to their extortion by bodily pain. And this is

legal and scientific in America. Amateur ordinary America, of course,

simply burns people alive in broad daylight, as they did in the

Reformation Wars. But though some punishments are more inhuman than

others there is no such thing as humane punishment. As long as nineteen

men claim the right in any sense or shape to take hold of the twentieth

man and make him even mildly uncomfortable, so long the whole

proceeding must be a humiliating one for all concerned. And the proof

of how poignantly men have always felt this lies in the fact that the

headsman and the hangman, the jailors and the torturers, were always

regarded not merely with fear but with contempt; while all kinds of

careless smiters, bankrupt knights and swashbucklers and outlaws, were

regarded with indulgence or even admiration. To kill a man lawlessly

was pardoned. To kill a man lawfully was unpardonable. The most

bare-faced duelist might almost brandish his weapon. But the

executioner was always masked.

This is the first essential element in government, coercion; a

necessary but not a noble element. I may remark in passing that when

people say that government rests on force they give an admirable

instance of the foggy and muddled cynicism of modernity. Government

does not rest on force. Government is force; it rests on consent or a

conception of justice. A king or a community holding a certain thing to

be abnormal, evil, uses the general strength to crush it out; the

strength is his tool, but the belief is his only sanction. You might as

well say that glass is the real reason for telescopes. But arising from

whatever reason the act of government is coercive and is burdened with

all the coarse and painful qualities of coercion. And if anyone asks

what is the use of insisting on the ugliness of this task of state

violence since all mankind is condemned to employ it, I have a simple

answer to that. It would be useless to insist on it if all humanity

were condemned to it. But it is not irrelevant to insist on its

ugliness so long as half of humanity is kept out of it

All government then is coercive; we happen to have created a government

which is not only coercive; but collective. There are only two kinds of

government, as I have already said, the despotic and the democratic.

Aristocracy is not a government, it is a riot; that most effective kind

of riot, a riot of the rich. The most intelligent apologists of

aristocracy, sophists like Burke and Nietzsche, have never claimed for

aristocracy any virtues but the virtues of a riot, the accidental

virtues, courage, variety and adventure. There is no case anywhere of

aristocracy having established a universal and applicable order, as

despots and democracies have often done; as the last Caesars created

the Roman law, as the last Jacobins created the Code Napoleon. With the

first of these elementary forms of government, that of the king or

chieftain, we are not in this matter of the sexes immediately

concerned. We shall return to it later when we remark how differently

mankind has dealt with female claims in the despotic as against the

democratic field. But for the moment the essential point is that in

self-governing countries this coercion of criminals is a collective

coercion. The abnormal person is theoretically thumped by a million

fists and kicked by a million feet. If a man is flogged we all flogged

him; if a man is hanged, we all hanged him. That is the only possible

meaning of democracy, which can give any meaning to the first two

syllables and also to the last two. In this sense each citizen has the

high responsibility of a rioter. Every statute is a declaration of war,

to be backed by arms. Every tribunal is a revolutionary tribunal. In a

republic all punishment is as sacred and solemn as lynching.

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When, therefore, it is said that the tradition against Female Suffrage

keeps women out of activity, social influence and citizenship, let us a

little more soberly and strictly ask ourselves what it actually does

keep her out of. It does definitely keep her out of the collective act

of coercion; the act of punishment by a mob. The human tradition does

say that, if twenty men hang a man from a tree or lamp-post, they shall

be twenty men and not women. Now I do not think any reasonable

Suffragist will deny that exclusion from this function, to say the

least of it, might be maintained to be a protection as well as a veto.

No candid person will wholly dismiss the proposition that the idea of

having a Lord Chancellor but not a Lady Chancellor may at least be

connected with the idea of having a headsman but not a headswoman, a

hangman but not a hangwoman. Nor will it be adequate to answer (as is

so often answered to this contention) that in modern civilization women

would not really be required to capture, to sentence, or to slay; that

all this is done indirectly, that specialists kill our criminals as

they kill our cattle. To urge this is not to urge the reality of the

vote, but to urge its unreality. Democracy was meant to be a more

direct way of ruling, not a more indirect way; and if we do not feel

that we are all jailers, so much the worse for us, and for the

prisoners. If it is really an unwomanly thing to lock up a robber or a

tyrant, it ought to be no softening of the situation that the woman

does not feel as if she were doing the thing that she certainly is

doing. It is bad enough that men can only associate on paper who could

once associate in the street; it is bad enough that men have made a

vote very much of a fiction. It is much worse that a great class should

claim the vote be cause it is a fiction, who would be sickened by it if

it were a fact. If votes for women do not mean mobs for women they do

not mean what they were meant to mean. A woman can make a cross on a

paper as well as a man; a child could do it as well as a woman; and a

chimpanzee after a few lessons could do it as well as a child. But

nobody ought to regard it merely as making a cross on paper; everyone

ought to regard it as what it ultimately is, branding the fleur-de-lis,

marking the broad arrow, signing the death warrant. Both men and women

ought to face more fully the things they do or cause to be done; face

them or leave off doing them.

On that disastrous day when public executions were abolished, private

executions were renewed and ratified, perhaps forever. Things grossly

unsuited to the moral sentiment of a society cannot be safely done in

broad daylight; but I see no reason why we should not still be roasting

heretics alive, in a private room. It is very likely (to speak in the

manner foolishly called Irish) that if there were public executions

there would be no executions. The old open-air punishments, the pillory

and the gibbet, at least fixed responsibility upon the law; and in

actual practice they gave the mob an opportunity of throwing roses as

well as rotten eggs; of crying "Hosannah" as well as "Crucify." But I

do not like the public executioner being turned into the private

executioner. I think it is a crooked oriental, sinister sort of

business, and smells of the harem and the divan rather than of the

forum and the market place. In modern times the official has lost all

the social honor and dignity of the common hangman. He is only the

bearer of the bowstring.

Here, however, I suggest a plea for a brutal publicity only in order to

emphasize the fact that it is this brutal publicity and nothing else

from which women have been excluded. I also say it to emphasize the

fact that the mere modern veiling of the brutality does not make the

situation different, unless we openly say that we are giving the

suffrage, not only because it is power but because it is not, or in

other words, that women are not so much to vote as to play voting. No

suffragist, I suppose, will take up that position; and a few

suffragists will wholly deny that this human necessity of pains and

penalties is an ugly, humiliating business, and that good motives as

well as bad may have helped to keep women out of it. More than once I

have remarked in these pages that female limitations may be the limits

of a temple as well as of a prison, the disabilities of a priest and

not of a pariah. I noted it, I think, in the case of the pontifical

feminine dress. In the same way it is not evidently irrational, if men

decided that a woman, like a priest, must not be a shedder of blood.

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But there is a further fact; forgotten also because we moderns forget

that there is a female point of view. The woman's wisdom stands partly,

not only for a wholesome hesitation about punishment, but even for a

wholesome hesitation about absolute rules. There was something feminine

and perversely true in that phrase of Wilde's, that people should not

be treated as the rule, but all of them as exceptions. Made by a man

the remark was a little effeminate; for Wilde did lack the masculine

power of dogma and of democratic cooperation. But if a woman had said

it it would have been simply true; a woman does treat each person as a

peculiar person. In other words, she stands for Anarchy; a very ancient

and arguable philosophy; not anarchy in the sense of having no customs

in one's life (which is inconceivable), but anarchy in the sense of

having no rules for one's mind. To her, almost certainly, are due all

those working traditions that cannot be found in books, especially

those of education; it was she who first gave a child a stuffed

stocking for being good or stood him in the corner for being naughty.

This unclassified knowledge is sometimes called rule of thumb and

sometimes motherwit. The last phrase suggests the whole truth, for none

ever called it fatherwit.

Now anarchy is only tact when it works badly. Tact is only anarchy when

it works well. And we ought to realize that in one half of the

world--the private house--it does work well. We modern men are

perpetually forgetting that the case for clear rules and crude

penalties is not self-evident, that there is a great deal to be said

for the benevolent lawlessness of the autocrat, especially on a small

scale; in short, that government is only one side of life. The other

half is called Society, in which women are admittedly dominant. And

they have always been ready to maintain that their kingdom is better

governed than ours, because (in the logical and legal sense) it is not

governed at all. "Whenever you have a real difficulty," they say, "when

a boy is bumptious or an aunt is stingy, when a silly girl will marry

somebody, or a wicked man won't marry somebody, all your lumbering

Roman Law and British Constitution come to a standstill. A snub from a

duchess or a slanging from a fish-wife are much more likely to put

things straight." So, at least, rang the ancient female challenge down

the ages until the recent female capitulation. So streamed the red

standard of the higher anarchy until Miss Pankhurst hoisted the white

flag.

It must be remembered that the modern world has done deep treason to

the eternal intellect by believing in the swing of the pendulum. A man

must be dead before he swings. It has substituted an idea of fatalistic

alternation for the mediaeval freedom of the soul seeking truth. All

modern thinkers are reactionaries; for their thought is always a

reaction from what went before. When you meet a modern man he is always

coming from a place, not going to it. Thus, mankind has in nearly all

places and periods seen that there is a soul and a body as plainly as

that there is a sun and moon. But because a narrow Protestant sect

called Materialists declared for a short time that there was no soul,

another narrow Protestant sect called Christian Science is now

maintaining that there is no body. Now just in the same way the

unreasonable neglect of government by the Manchester School has

produced, not a reasonable regard for government, but an unreasonable

neglect of everything else. So that to hear people talk to-day one

would fancy that every important human function must be organized and

avenged by law; that all education must be state education, and all

employment state employment; that everybody and everything must be

brought to the foot of the august and prehistoric gibbet. But a

somewhat more liberal and sympathetic examination of mankind will

convince us that the cross is even older than the gibbet, that

voluntary suffering was before and independent of compulsory; and in

short that in most important matters a man has always been free to ruin

himself if he chose. The huge fundamental function upon which all

anthropology turns, that of sex and childbirth, has never been inside

the political state, but always outside of it. The state concerned

itself with the trivial question of killing people, but wisely left

alone the whole business of getting them born. A Eugenist might indeed

plausibly say that the government is an absent-minded and inconsistent

person who occupies himself with providing for the old age of people

who have never been infants. I will not deal here in any detail with

the fact that some Eugenists have in our time made the maniacal answer

that the police ought to control marriage and birth as they control

labor and death. Except for this inhuman handful (with whom I regret to

say I shall have to deal with later) all the Eugenists I know divide

themselves into two sections: ingenious people who once meant this, and

rather bewildered people who swear they never meant it--nor anything

else. But if it be conceded (by a breezier estimate of men) that they

do mostly desire marriage to remain free from government, it does not

follow that they desire it to remain free from everything. If man does

not control the marriage market by law, is it controlled at all? Surely

the answer is broadly that man does not control the marriage market by

law, but the woman does control it by sympathy and prejudice. There was

until lately a law forbidding a man to marry his deceased wife's

sister; yet the thing happened constantly. There was no law forbidding

a man to marry his deceased wife's scullery-maid; yet it did not happen

nearly so often. It did not happen because the marriage market is

managed in the spirit and by the authority of women; and women are

generally conservative where classes are concerned. It is the same with

that system of exclusiveness by which ladies have so often contrived

(as by a process of elimination) to prevent marriages that they did not

want and even sometimes procure those they did. There is no need of the

broad arrow and the fleur-de lis, the turnkey's chains or the hangman's

halter. You need not strangle a man if you can silence him. The branded

shoulder is less effective and final than the cold shoulder; and you

need not trouble to lock a man in when you can lock him out.

The same, of course, is true of the colossal architecture which we call

infant education: an architecture reared wholly by women. Nothing can

ever overcome that one enormous sex superiority, that even the male

child is born closer to his mother than to his father. No one, staring

at that frightful female privilege, can quite believe in the equality

of the sexes. Here and there we read of a girl brought up like a

tom-boy; but every boy is brought up like a tame girl. The flesh and

spirit of femininity surround him from the first like the four walls of

a house; and even the vaguest or most brutal man has been womanized by

being born. Man that is born of a woman has short days and full of

misery; but nobody can picture the obscenity and bestial tragedy that

would belong to such a monster as man that was born of a man.

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But, indeed, with this educational matter I must of necessity embroil

myself later. The fourth section of discussion is supposed to be about

the child, but I think it will be mostly about the mother. In this

place I have systematically insisted on the large part of life that is

governed, not by man with his vote, but by woman with her voice, or

more often, with her horrible silence. Only one thing remains to be

added. In a sprawling and explanatory style has been traced out the

idea that government is ultimately coercion, that coercion must mean

cold definitions as well as cruel consequences, and that therefore

there is something to be said for the old human habit of keeping

one-half of humanity out of so harsh and dirty a business. But the case

is stronger still.

Voting is not only coercion, but collective coercion. I think Queen

Victoria would have been yet more popular and satisfying if she had

never signed a death warrant. I think Queen Elizabeth would have stood

out as more solid and splendid in history if she had not earned (among

those who happen to know her history) the nickname of Bloody Bess. I

think, in short, that the great historic woman is more herself when she

is persuasive rather than coercive. But I feel all mankind behind me

when I say that if a woman has this power it should be despotic

power--not democratic power. There is a much stronger historic argument

for giving Miss Pankhurst a throne than for giving her a vote. She

might have a crown, or at least a coronet, like so many of her

supporters; for these old powers are purely personal and therefore

female. Miss Pankhurst as a despot might be as virtuous as Queen

Victoria, and she certainly would find it difficult to be as wicked as

Queen Bess, but the point is that, good or bad, she would be

irresponsible-- she would not be governed by a rule and by a ruler.

There are only two ways of governing: by a rule and by a ruler. And it

is seriously true to say of a woman, in education and domesticity, that

the freedom of the autocrat appears to be necessary to her. She is

never responsible until she is irresponsible. In case this sounds like

an idle contradiction, I confidently appeal to the cold facts of

history. Almost every despotic or oligarchic state has admitted women

to its privileges. Scarcely one democratic state has ever admitted them

to its rights The reason is very simple: that something female is

endangered much more by the violence of the crowd. In short, one

Pankhurst is an exception, but a thousand Pankhursts are a nightmare, a

Bacchic orgie, a Witches Sabbath. For in all legends men have thought

of women as sublime separately but horrible in a herd.

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Now I have only taken the test case of Female Suffrage because it is

topical and concrete; it is not of great moment for me as a political

proposal. I can quite imagine anyone substantially agreeing with my

view of woman as universalist and autocrat in a limited area; and still

thinking that she would be none the worse for a ballot paper. The real

question is whether this old ideal of woman as the great amateur is

admitted or not. There are many modern things which threaten it much

more than suffragism; notably the increase of self-supporting women,

even in the most severe or the most squalid employments. If there be

something against nature in the idea of a horde of wild women

governing, there is something truly intolerable in the idea of a herd

of tame women being governed. And there are elements in human

psychology that make this situation particularly poignant or

ignominous. The ugly exactitudes of business, the bells and clocks the

fixed hours and rigid departments, were all meant for the male: who, as

a rule, can only do one thing and can only with the greatest difficulty

be induced to do that. If clerks do not try to shirk their work, our

whole great commercial system breaks down. It is breaking down, under

the inroad of women who are adopting the unprecedented and impossible

course of taking the system seriously and doing it well. Their very

efficiency is the definition of their slavery. It is generally a very

bad sign when one is trusted very much by one's employers. And if the

evasive clerks have a look of being blackguards, the earnest ladies are

often something very like blacklegs. But the more immediate point is

that the modern working woman bears a double burden, for she endures

both the grinding officialism of the new office and the distracting

scrupulosity of the old home. Few men understand what conscientiousness

is. They understand duty, which generally means one duty; but

conscientiousness is the duty of the universalist. It is limited by no

work days or holidays; it is a lawless, limitless, devouring decorum.

If women are to be subjected to the dull rule of commerce, we must find

some way of emancipating them from the wild rule of conscience. But I

rather fancy you will find it easier to leave the conscience and knock

off the commerce. As it is, the modern clerk or secretary exhausts

herself to put one thing straight in the ledger and then goes home to

put everything straight in the house.

This condition (described by some as emancipated) is at least the

reverse of my ideal. I would give woman, not more rights, but more

privileges. Instead of sending her to seek such freedom as notoriously

prevails in banks and factories, I would design specially a house in

which she can be free. And with that we come to the last point of all;

the point at which we can perceive the needs of women, like the rights

of men, stopped and falsified by something which it is the object of

this book to expose.

The Feminist (which means, I think, one who dislikes the chief feminine

characteristics) has heard my loose monologue, bursting all the time

with one pent-up protest. At this point he will break out and say, "But

what are we to do? There is modern commerce and its clerks; there is

the modern family with its unmarried daughters; specialism is expected

everywhere; female thrift and conscientiousness are demanded and

supplied. What does it matter whether we should in the abstract prefer

the old human and housekeeping woman; we might prefer the Garden of

Eden. But since women have trades they ought to have trades unions.

Since women work in factories, they ought to vote on factory-acts. If

they are unmarried they must be commercial; if they are commercial they

must be political. We must have new rules for a new world-- even if it

be not a better one." I said to a Feminist once: "The question is not

whether women are good enough for votes: it is whether votes are good

enough for women." He only answered: "Ah, you go and say that to the

women chain-makers on Cradley Heath."

Now this is the attitude which I attack. It is the huge heresy of

Precedent. It is the view that because we have got into a mess we must

grow messier to suit it; that because we have taken a wrong turn some

time ago we must go forward and not backwards; that because we have

lost our way we must lose our map also; and because we have missed our

ideal, we must forget it. "There are numbers of excellent people who do

not think votes unfeminine; and there may be enthusiasts for our

beautiful modern industry who do not think factories unfeminine. But if

these things are unfeminine it is no answer to say that they fit into

each other. I am not satisfied with the statement that my daughter must

have unwomanly powers because she has unwomanly wrongs. Industrial soot

and political printer's ink are two blacks which do not make a white.

Most of the Feminists would probably agree with me that womanhood is

under shameful tyranny in the shops and mills. But I want to destroy

the tyranny. They want to destroy womanhood. That is the only

difference.

Whether we can recover the clear vision of woman as a tower with many

windows, the fixed eternal feminine from which her sons, the

specialists, go forth; whether we can preserve the tradition of a

central thing which is even more human than democracy and even more

practical than politics; whether, in word, it is possible to

re-establish the family, freed from the filthy cynicism and cruelty of

the commercial epoch, I shall discuss in the last section of this book.

But meanwhile do not talk to me about the poor chain-makers on Cradley

Heath. I know all about them and what they are doing. They are engaged

in a very wide-spread and flourishing industry of the present age. They

are making chains.

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When I wrote a little volume on my friend Mr. Bernard Shaw, it is

needless to say that he reviewed it. I naturally felt tempted to answer

and to criticise the book from the same disinterested and impartial

standpoint from which Mr. Shaw had criticised the subject of it. I was

not withheld by any feeling that the joke was getting a little obvious;

for an obvious joke is only a successful joke; it is only the

unsuccessful clowns who comfort themselves with being subtle. The real

reason why I did not answer Mr. Shaw's amusing attack was this: that

one simple phrase in it surrendered to me all that I have ever wanted,

or could want from him to all eternity. I told Mr. Shaw (in substance)

that he was a charming and clever fellow, but a common Calvinist. He

admitted that this was true, and there (so far as I am concerned) is an

end of the matter. He said that, of course, Calvin was quite right in

holding that "if once a man is born it is too late to damn or save

him." That is the fundamental and subterranean secret; that is the last

lie in hell.

The difference between Puritanism and Catholicism is not about whether

some priestly word or gesture is significant and sacred. It is about

whether any word or gesture is significant and sacred. To the Catholic

every other daily act is dramatic dedication to the service of good or

of evil. To the Calvinist no act can have that sort of solemnity,

because the person doing it has been dedicated from eternity, and is

merely filling up his time until the crack of doom. The difference is

something subtler than plum-puddings or private theatricals; the

difference is that to a Christian of my kind this short earthly life is

intensely thrilling and precious; to a Calvinist like Mr. Shaw it is

confessedly automatic and uninteresting. To me these threescore years

and ten are the battle. To the Fabian Calvinist (by his own confession)

they are only a long procession of the victors in laurels and the

vanquished in chains. To me earthly life is the drama; to him it is the

epilogue. Shavians think about the embryo; Spiritualists about the

ghost; Christians about the man. It is as well to have these things

clear.

Now all our sociology and eugenics and the rest of it are not so much

materialist as confusedly Calvinist, they are chiefly occupied in

educating the child before he exists. The whole movement is full of a

singular depression about what one can do with the populace, combined

with a strange disembodied gayety about what may be done with

posterity. These essential Calvinists have, indeed, abolished some of

the more liberal and universal parts of Calvinism, such as the belief

in an intellectual design or an everlasting happiness. But though Mr.

Shaw and his friends admit it is a superstition that a man is judged

after death, they stick to their central doctrine, that he is judged

before he is born.

In consequence of this atmosphere of Calvinism in the cultured world of

to-day, it is apparently necessary to begin all arguments on education

with some mention of obstetrics and the unknown world of the prenatal.

All I shall have to say, however, on heredity will be very brief,

because I shall confine myself to what is known about it, and that is

very nearly nothing. It is by no means self-evident, but it is a

current modern dogma, that nothing actually enters the body at birth

except a life derived and compounded from the parents. There is at

least quite as much to be said for the Christian theory that an element

comes from God, or the Buddhist theory that such an element comes from

previous existences. But this is not a religious work, and I must

submit to those very narrow intellectual limits which the absence of

theology always imposes. Leaving the soul on one side, let us suppose

for the sake of argument that the human character in the first case

comes wholly from parents; and then let us curtly state our knowledge

rather than our ignorance.

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Popular science, like that of Mr. Blatchford, is in this matter as mild

as old wives' tales. Mr. Blatchford, with colossal simplicity,

explained to millions of clerks and workingmen that the mother is like

a bottle of blue beads and the father is like a bottle of yellow beads;

and so the child is like a bottle of mixed blue beads and yellow. He

might just as well have said that if the father has two legs and the

mother has two legs, the child will have four legs. Obviously it is not

a question of simple addition or simple division of a number of hard

detached "qualities," like beads. It is an organic crisis and

transformation of the most mysterious sort; so that even if the result

is unavoidable, it will still be unexpected. It is not like blue beads

mixed with yellow beads; it is like blue mixed with yellow; the result

of which is green, a totally novel and unique experience, a new

emotion. A man might live in a complete cosmos of blue and yellow, like

the "Edinburgh Review"; a man might never have seen anything but a

golden cornfield and a sapphire sky; and still he might never have had

so wild a fancy as green. If you paid a sovereign for a bluebell; if

you spilled the mustard on the blue-books; if you married a canary to a

blue baboon; there is nothing in any of these wild weddings that

contains even a hint of green. Green is not a mental combination, like

addition; it is a physical result like birth. So, apart from the fact

that nobody ever really understands parents or children either, yet

even if we could understand the parents, we could not make any

conjecture about the children. Each time the force works in a different

way; each time the constituent colors combine into a different

spectacle. A girl may actually inherit her ugliness from her mother's

good looks. A boy may actually get his weakness from his father's

strength. Even if we admit it is really a fate, for us it must remain a

fairy tale. Considered in regard to its causes, the Calvinists and

materialists may be right or wrong; we leave them their dreary debate.

But considered in regard to its results there is no doubt about it. The

thing is always a new color; a strange star. Every birth is as lonely

as a miracle. Every child is as uninvited as a monstrosity.

On all such subjects there is no science, but only a sort of ardent

ignorance; and nobody has ever been able to offer any theories of moral

heredity which justified themselves in the only scientific sense; that

is that one could calculate on them beforehand. There are six cases,

say, of a grandson having the same twitch of mouth or vice of character

as his grandfather; or perhaps there are sixteen cases, or perhaps

sixty. But there are not two cases, there is not one case, there are no

cases at all, of anybody betting half a crown that the grandfather will

have a grandson with the twitch or the vice. In short, we deal with

heredity as we deal with omens, affinities and the fulfillment of

dreams. The things do happen, and when they happen we record them; but

not even a lunatic ever reckons on them. Indeed, heredity, like dreams

and omens, is a barbaric notion; that is, not necessarily an untrue,

but a dim, groping and unsystematized notion. A civilized man feels

himself a little more free from his family. Before Christianity these

tales of tribal doom occupied the savage north; and since the

Reformation and the revolt against Christianity (which is the religion

of a civilized freedom) savagery is slowly creeping back in the form of

realistic novels and problem plays. The curse of Rougon-Macquart is as

heathen and superstitious as the curse of Ravenswood; only not so well

written. But in this twilight barbaric sense the feeling of a racial

fate is not irrational, and may be allowed like a hundred other half

emotions that make life whole. The only essential of tragedy is that

one should take it lightly. But even when the barbarian deluge rose to

its highest in the madder novels of Zola (such as that called "The

Human Beast", a gross libel on beasts as well as humanity), even then

the application of the hereditary idea to practice is avowedly timid

and fumbling. The students of heredity are savages in this vital sense;

that they stare back at marvels, but they dare not stare forward to

schemes. In practice no one is mad enough to legislate or educate upon

dogmas of physical inheritance; and even the language of the thing is

rarely used except for special modern purposes, such as the endowment

of research or the oppression of the poor.

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After all the modern clatter of Calvinism, therefore, it is only with

the born child that anybody dares to deal; and the question is not

eugenics but education. Or again, to adopt that rather tiresome

terminology of popular science, it is not a question of heredity but of

environment. I will not needlessly complicate this question by urging

at length that environment also is open to some of the objections and

hesitations which paralyze the employment of heredity. I will merely

suggest in passing that even about the effect of environment modern

people talk much too cheerfully and cheaply. The idea that surroundings

will mold a man is always mixed up with the totally different idea that

they will mold him in one particular way. To take the broadest case,

landscape no doubt affects the soul; but how it affects it is quite

another matter. To be born among pine-trees might mean loving

pine-trees. It might mean loathing pine-trees. It might quite seriously

mean never having seen a pine-tree. Or it might mean any mixture of

these or any degree of any of them. So that the scientific method here

lacks a little in precision. I am not speaking without the book; on the

contrary, I am speaking with the blue book, with the guide-book and the

atlas. It may be that the Highlanders are poetical because they inhabit

mountains; but are the Swiss prosaic because they inhabit mountains? It

may be the Swiss have fought for freedom because they had hills; did

the Dutch fight for freedom because they hadn't? Personally I should

think it quite likely. Environment might work negatively as well as

positively. The Swiss may be sensible, not in spite of their wild

skyline, but be cause of their wild skyline. The Flemings may be

fantastic artists, not in spite of their dull skyline, but because of

it.

I only pause on this parenthesis to show that, even in matters

admittedly within its range, popular science goes a great deal too

fast, and drops enormous links of logic. Nevertheless, it remains the

working reality that what we have to deal with in the case of children

is, for all practical purposes, environment; or, to use the older word,

education. When all such deductions are made, education is at least a

form of will-worship; not of cowardly fact-worship; it deals with a

department that we can control; it does not merely darken us with the

barbarian pessimism of Zola and the heredity-hunt. We shall certainly

make fools of ourselves; that is what is meant by philosophy. But we

shall not merely make beasts of ourselves; which is the nearest popular

definition for merely following the laws of Nature and cowering under

the vengeance of the flesh Education contains much moonshine; but not

of the sort that makes mere mooncalves and idiots the slaves of a

silver magnet, the one eye of the world. In this decent arena there are

fads, but not frenzies. Doubtless we shall often find a mare's nest;

but it will not always be the nightmare's.

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When a man is asked to write down what he really thinks on education, a

certain gravity grips and stiffens his soul, which might be mistaken by

the superficial for disgust. If it be really true that men sickened of

sacred words and wearied of theology, if this largely unreasoning

irritation against "dogma" did arise out of some ridiculous excess of

such things among priests in the past, then I fancy we must be laying

up a fine crop of cant for our descendants to grow tired of. Probably

the word "education" will some day seem honestly as old and objectless

as the word "justification" now seems in a Puritan folio. Gibbon

thought it frightfully funny that people should have fought about the

difference between the "Homoousion" and the "Homoiousion." The time

will come when somebody will laugh louder to think that men thundered

against Sectarian Education and also against Secular Education; that

men of prominence and position actually denounced the schools for

teaching a creed and also for not teaching a faith. The two Greek words

in Gibbon look rather alike; but they really mean quite different

things. Faith and creed do not look alike, but they mean exactly the

same thing. Creed happens to be the Latin for faith.

Now having read numberless newspaper articles on education, and even

written a good many of them, and having heard deafening and

indeterminate discussion going on all around me almost ever since I was

born, about whether religion was part of education, about whether

hygiene was an essential of education, about whether militarism was

inconsistent with true education, I naturally pondered much on this

recurring substantive, and I am ashamed to say that it was

comparatively late in life that I saw the main fact about it.

Of course, the main fact about education is that there is no such

thing. It does not exist, as theology or soldiering exist. Theology is

a word like geology, soldiering is a word like soldering; these

sciences may be healthy or no as hobbies; but they deal with stone and

kettles, with definite things. But education is not a word like geology

or kettles. Education is a word like "transmission" or "inheritance";

it is not an object, but a method. It must mean the conveying of

certain facts, views or qualities, to the last baby born. They might be

the most trivial facts or the most preposterous views or the most

offensive qualities; but if they are handed on from one generation to

another they are education. Education is not a thing like theology, it

is not an inferior or superior thing; it is not a thing in the same

category of terms. Theology and education are to each other like a

love-letter to the General Post Office. Mr. Fagin was quite as

educational as Dr. Strong; in practice probably more educational. It is

giving something--perhaps poison. Education is tradition, and tradition

(as its name implies) can be treason.

This first truth is frankly banal; but it is so perpetually ignored in

our political prosing that it must be made plain. A little boy in a

little house, son of a little tradesman, is taught to eat his

breakfast, to take his medicine, to love his country, to say his

prayers, and to wear his Sunday clothes. Obviously Fagin, if he found

such a boy, would teach him to drink gin, to lie, to betray his

country, to blaspheme and to wear false whiskers. But so also Mr. Salt

the vegetarian would abolish the boy's breakfast; Mrs. Eddy would throw

away his medicine; Count Tolstoi would rebuke him for loving his

country; Mr. Blatchford would stop his prayers, and Mr. Edward

Carpenter would theoretically denounce Sunday clothes, and perhaps all

clothes. I do not defend any of these advanced views, not even Fagin's.

But I do ask what, between the lot of them, has become of the abstract

entity called education. It is not (as commonly supposed) that the

tradesman teaches education plus Christianity; Mr. Salt, education plus

vegetarianism; Fagin, education plus crime. The truth is, that there is

nothing in common at all between these teachers, except that they

teach. In short, the only thing they share is the one thing they

profess to dislike: the general idea of authority. It is quaint that

people talk of separating dogma from education. Dogma is actually the

only thing that cannot be separated from education. It is education. A

teacher who is not dogmatic is simply a teacher who is not teaching.

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The fashionable fallacy is that by education we can give people

something that we have not got. To hear people talk one would think it

was some sort of magic chemistry, by which, out of a laborious

hotchpotch of hygienic meals, baths, breathing exercises, fresh air and

freehand drawing, we can produce something splendid by accident; we can

create what we cannot conceive. These pages have, of course, no other

general purpose than to point out that we cannot create anything good

until we have conceived it. It is odd that these people, who in the

matter of heredity are so sullenly attached to law, in the matter of

environment seem almost to believe in miracle. They insist that nothing

but what was in the bodies of the parents can go to make the bodies of

the children. But they seem somehow to think that things can get into

the heads of the children which were not in the heads of the parents,

or, indeed, anywhere else.

There has arisen in this connection a foolish and wicked cry typical of

the confusion. I mean the cry, "Save the children." It is, of course,

part of that modern morbidity that insists on treating the State (which

is the home of man) as a sort of desperate expedient in time of panic.

This terrified opportunism is also the origin of the Socialist and

other schemes. Just as they would collect and share all the food as men

do in a famine, so they would divide the children from their fathers,

as men do in a shipwreck. That a human community might conceivably not

be in a condition of famine or shipwreck never seems to cross their

minds. This cry of "Save the children" has in it the hateful

implication that it is impossible to save the fathers; in other words,

that many millions of grown-up, sane, responsible and self-supporting

Europeans are to be treated as dirt or debris and swept away out of the

discussion; called dipsomaniacs because they drink in public houses

instead of private houses; called unemployables because nobody knows

how to get them work; called dullards if they still adhere to

conventions, and called loafers if they still love liberty. Now I am

concerned, first and last, to maintain that unless you can save the

fathers, you cannot save the children; that at present we cannot save

others, for we cannot save ourselves. We cannot teach citizenship if we

are not citizens; we cannot free others if we have forgotten the

appetite of freedom. Education is only truth in a state of

transmission; and how can we pass on truth if it has never come into

our hand? Thus we find that education is of all the cases the clearest

for our general purpose. It is vain to save children; for they cannot

remain children. By hypothesis we are teaching them to be men; and how

can it be so simple to teach an ideal manhood to others if it is so

vain and hopeless to find one for ourselves?

I know that certain crazy pedants have attempted to counter this

difficulty by maintaining that education is not instruction at all,

does not teach by authority at all. They present the process as coming,

not from the outside, from the teacher, but entirely from inside the

boy. Education, they say, is the Latin for leading out or drawing out

the dormant faculties of each person. Somewhere far down in the dim

boyish soul is a primordial yearning to learn Greek accents or to wear

clean collars; and the schoolmaster only gently and tenderly liberates

this imprisoned purpose. Sealed up in the newborn babe are the

intrinsic secrets of how to eat asparagus and what was the date of

Bannockburn. The educator only draws out the child's own unapparent

love of long division; only leads out the child's slightly veiled

preference for milk pudding to tarts. I am not sure that I believe in

the derivation; I have heard the disgraceful suggestion that

"educator," if applied to a Roman schoolmaster, did not mean leading

our young functions into freedom; but only meant taking out little boys

for a walk. But I am much more certain that I do not agree with the

doctrine; I think it would be about as sane to say that the baby's milk

comes from the baby as to say that the baby's educational merits do.

There is, indeed, in each living creature a collection of forces and

functions; but education means producing these in particular shapes and

training them to particular purposes, or it means nothing at all.

Speaking is the most practical instance of the whole situation. You may

indeed "draw out" squeals and grunts from the child by simply poking

him and pulling him about, a pleasant but cruel pastime to which many

psychologists are addicted. But you will wait and watch very patiently

indeed before you draw the English language out of him. That you have

got to put into him; and there is an end of the matter.

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But the important point here is only that you cannot anyhow get rid of

authority in education; it is not so much (as poor Conservatives say)

that parental authority ought to be preserved, as that it cannot be

destroyed. Mr. Bernard Shaw once said that he hated the idea of forming

a child's mind. In that case Mr. Bernard Shaw had better hang himself;

for he hates something inseparable from human life. I only mentioned

educere and the drawing out of the faculties in order to point out that

even this mental trick does not avoid the inevitable idea of parental

or scholastic authority. The educator drawing out is just as arbitrary

and coercive as the instructor pouring in; for he draws out what he

chooses. He decides what in the child shall be developed and what shall

not be developed. He does not (I suppose) draw out the neglected

faculty of forgery. He does not (so far at least) lead out, with timid

steps, a shy talent for torture. The only result of all this pompous

and precise distinction between the educator and the instructor is that

the instructor pokes where he likes and the educator pulls where he

likes. Exactly the same intellectual violence is done to the creature

who is poked and pulled. Now we must all accept the responsibility of

this intellectual violence. Education is violent; because it is

creative. It is creative because it is human. It is as reckless as

playing on the fiddle; as dogmatic as drawing a picture; as brutal as

building a house. In short, it is what all human action is; it is an

interference with life and growth. After that it is a trifling and even

a jocular question whether we say of this tremendous tormentor, the

artist Man, that he puts things into us like an apothecary, or draws

things out of us, like a dentist.

The point is that Man does what he likes. He claims the right to take

his mother Nature under his control; he claims the right to make his

child the Superman, in his image. Once flinch from this creative

authority of man, and the whole courageous raid which we call

civilization wavers and falls to pieces. Now most modern freedom is at

root fear. It is not so much that we are too bold to endure rules; it

is rather that we are too timid to endure responsibilities. And Mr.

Shaw and such people are especially shrinking from that awful and

ancestral responsibility to which our fathers committed us when they

took the wild step of becoming men. I mean the responsibility of

affirming the truth of our human tradition and handing it on with a

voice of authority, an unshaken voice. That is the one eternal

education; to be sure enough that something is true that you dare to

tell it to a child. From this high audacious duty the moderns are

fleeing on every side; and the only excuse for them is, (of course,)

that their modern philosophies are so half-baked and hypothetical that

they cannot convince themselves enough to convince even a newborn babe.

This, of course, is connected with the decay of democracy; and is

somewhat of a separate subject. Suffice it to say here that when I say

that we should instruct our children, I mean that we should do it, not

that Mr. Sully or Professor Earl Barnes should do it. The trouble in

too many of our modern schools is that the State, being controlled so

specially by the few, allows cranks and experiments to go straight to

the schoolroom when they have never passed through the Parliament, the

public house, the private house, the church, or the marketplace.

Obviously, it ought to be the oldest things that are taught to the

youngest people; the assured and experienced truths that are put first

to the baby. But in a school to-day the baby has to submit to a system

that is younger than himself. The flopping infant of four actually has

more experience, and has weathered the world longer, than the dogma to

which he is made to submit. Many a school boasts of having the last

ideas in education, when it has not even the first idea; for the first

idea is that even innocence, divine as it is, may learn something from

experience. But this, as I say, is all due to the mere fact that we are

managed by a little oligarchy; my system presupposes that men who

govern themselves will govern their children. To-day we all use Popular

Education as meaning education of the people. I wish I could use it as

meaning education by the people.

The urgent point at present is that these expansive educators do not

avoid the violence of authority an inch more than the old school

masters. Nay, it might be maintained that they avoid it less. The old

village schoolmaster beat a boy for not learning grammar and sent him

out into the playground to play anything he liked; or at nothing, if he

liked that better. The modern scientific schoolmaster pursues him into

the playground and makes him play at cricket, because exercise is so

good for the health. The modern Dr. Busby is a doctor of medicine as

well as a doctor of divinity. He may say that the good of exercise is

self-evident; but he must say it, and say it with authority. It cannot

really be self-evident or it never could have been compulsory. But this

is in modern practice a very mild case. In modern practice the free

educationists forbid far more things than the old-fashioned

educationists. A person with a taste for paradox (if any such shameless

creature could exist) might with some plausibility maintain concerning

all our expansion since the failure of Luther's frank paganism and its

replacement by Calvin's Puritanism, that all this expansion has not

been an expansion, but the closing in of a prison, so that less and

less beautiful and humane things have been permitted. The Puritans

destroyed images; the Rationalists forbade fairy tales. Count Tostoi

practically issued one of his papal encyclicals against music; and I

have heard of modern educationists who forbid children to play with tin

soldiers. I remember a meek little madman who came up to me at some

Socialist soiree or other, and asked me to use my influence (have I any

influence?) against adventure stories for boys. It seems they breed an

appetite for blood. But never mind that; one must keep one's temper in

this madhouse. I need only insist here that these things, even if a

just deprivation, are a deprivation. I do not deny that the old vetoes

and punishments were often idiotic and cruel; though they are much more

so in a country like England (where in practice only a rich man decrees

the punishment and only a poor man receives it) than in countries with

a clearer popular tradition-- such as Russia. In Russia flogging is

often inflicted by peasants on a peasant. In modern England flogging

can only in practice be inflicted by a gentleman on a very poor man.

Thus only a few days ago as I write a small boy (a son of the poor, of

course) was sentenced to flogging and imprisonment for five years for

having picked up a small piece of coal which the experts value at 5d. I

am entirely on the side of such liberals and humanitarians as have

protested against this almost bestial ignorance about boys. But I do

think it a little unfair that these humanitarians, who excuse boys for

being robbers, should denounce them for playing at robbers. I do think

that those who understand a guttersnipe playing with a piece of coal

might, by a sudden spurt of imagination, understand him playing with a

tin soldier. To sum it up in one sentence: I think my meek little

madman might have understood that there is many a boy who would rather

be flogged, and unjustly flogged, than have his adventure story taken

away.

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In short, the new education is as harsh as the old, whether or no it is

as high. The freest fad, as much as the strictest formula, is stiff

with authority. It is because the humane father thinks soldiers wrong

that they are forbidden; there is no pretense, there can be no

pretense, that the boy would think so. The average boy's impression

certainly would be simply this: "If your father is a Methodist you must

not play with soldiers on Sunday. If your father is a Socialist you

must not play with them even on week days." All educationists are

utterly dogmatic and authoritarian. You cannot have free education; for

if you left a child free you would not educate him at all. Is there,

then, no distinction or difference between the most hide-bound

conventionalists and the most brilliant and bizarre innovators? Is

there no difference between the heaviest heavy father and the most

reckless and speculative maiden aunt? Yes; there is. The difference is

that the heavy father, in his heavy way, is a democrat. He does not

urge a thing merely because to his fancy it should be done; but,

because (in his own admirable republican formula) "Everybody does it."

The conventional authority does claim some popular mandate; the

unconventional authority does not. The Puritan who forbids soldiers on

Sunday is at least expressing Puritan opinion; not merely his own

opinion. He is not a despot; he is a democracy, a tyrannical democracy,

a dingy and local democracy perhaps; but one that could do and has done

the two ultimate virile things--fight and appeal to God. But the veto

of the new educationist is like the veto of the House of Lords; it does

not pretend to be representative. These innovators are always talking

about the blushing modesty of Mrs. Grundy. I do not know whether Mrs.

Grundy is more modest than they are; but I am sure she is more humble.

But there is a further complication. The more anarchic modern may again

attempt to escape the dilemma by saying that education should only be

an enlargement of the mind, an opening of all the organs of

receptivity. Light (he says) should be brought into darkness; blinded

and thwarted existences in all our ugly corners should merely be

permitted to perceive and expand; in short, enlightenment should be

shed over darkest London. Now here is just the trouble; that, in so far

as this is involved, there is no darkest London. London is not dark at

all; not even at night. We have said that if education is a solid

substance, then there is none of it. We may now say that if education

is an abstract expansion there is no lack of it. There is far too much

of it. In fact, there is nothing else.

There are no uneducated people. Everybody in England is educated; only

most people are educated wrong. The state schools were not the first

schools, but among the last schools to be established; and London had

been educating Londoners long before the London School Board. The error

is a highly practical one. It is persistently assumed that unless a

child is civilized by the established schools, he must remain a

barbarian. I wish he did. Every child in London becomes a highly

civilized person. But here are so many different civilizations, most of

them born tired. Anyone will tell you that the trouble with the poor is

not so much that the old are still foolish, but rather that the young

are already wise. Without going to school at all, the gutter-boy would

be educated. Without going to school at all, he would be over-educated.

The real object of our schools should be not so much to suggest

complexity as solely to restore simplicity. You will hear venerable

idealists declare we must make war on the ignorance of the poor; but,

indeed, we have rather to make war on their knowledge. Real

educationists have to resist a kind of roaring cataract of culture. The

truant is being taught all day. If the children do not look at the

large letters in the spelling-book, they need only walk outside and

look at the large letters on the poster. If they do not care for the

colored maps provided by the school, they can gape at the colored maps

provided by the Daily Mail. If they tire of electricity, they can take

to electric trams. If they are unmoved by music, they can take to

drink. If they will not work so as to get a prize from their school,

they may work to get a prize from Prizy Bits. If they cannot learn

enough about law and citizenship to please the teacher, they learn

enough about them to avoid the policeman. If they will not learn

history forwards from the right end in the history books, they will

learn it backwards from the wrong end in the party newspapers. And this

is the tragedy of the whole affair: that the London poor, a

particularly quick-witted and civilized class, learn everything tail

foremost, learn even what is right in the way of what is wrong. They do

not see the first principles of law in a law book; they only see its

last results in the police news. They do not see the truths of politics

in a general survey. They only see the lies of politics, at a General

Election.

But whatever be the pathos of the London poor, it has nothing to do

with being uneducated. So far from being without guidance, they are

guided constantly, earnestly, excitedly; only guided wrong. The poor

are not at all neglected, they are merely oppressed; nay, rather they

are persecuted. There are no people in London who are not appealed to

by the rich; the appeals of the rich shriek from every hoarding and

shout from every hustings. For it should always be remembered that the

queer, abrupt ugliness of our streets and costumes are not the creation

of democracy, but of aristocracy. The House of Lords objected to the

Embankment being disfigured by trams. But most of the rich men who

disfigure the street-walls with their wares are actually in the House

of Lords. The peers make the country seats beautiful by making the town

streets hideous. This, however, is parenthetical. The point is, that

the poor in London are not left alone, but rather deafened and

bewildered with raucous and despotic advice. They are not like sheep

without a shepherd. They are more like one sheep whom twenty-seven

shepherds are shouting at. All the newspapers, all the new

advertisements, all the new medicines and new theologies, all the glare

and blare of the gas and brass of modern times-- it is against these

that the national school must bear up if it can. I will not question

that our elementary education is better than barbaric ignorance. But

there is no barbaric ignorance. I do not doubt that our schools would

be good for uninstructed boys. But there are no uninstructed boys. A

modern London school ought not merely to be clearer, kindlier, more

clever and more rapid than ignorance and darkness. It must also be

clearer than a picture postcard, cleverer than a Limerick competition,

quicker than the tram, and kindlier than the tavern. The school, in

fact, has the responsibility of universal rivalry. We need not deny

that everywhere there is a light that must conquer darkness. But here

we demand a light that can conquer light.

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I will take one case that will serve both as symbol and example: the

case of color. We hear the realists (those sentimental fellows) talking

about the gray streets and the gray lives of the poor. But whatever the

poor streets are they are not gray; but motley, striped, spotted,

piebald and patched like a quilt. Hoxton is not aesthetic enough to be

monochrome; and there is nothing of the Celtic twilight about it. As a

matter of fact, a London gutter-boy walks unscathed among furnaces of

color. Watch him walk along a line of hoardings, and you will see him

now against glowing green, like a traveler in a tropic forest; now

black like a bird against the burning blue of the Midi; now passant

across a field gules, like the golden leopards of England. He ought to

understand the irrational rapture of that cry of Mr. Stephen Phillips

about "that bluer blue, that greener green." There is no blue much

bluer than Reckitt's Blue and no blacking blacker than Day and

Martin's; no more emphatic yellow than that of Colman's Mustard. If,

despite this chaos of color, like a shattered rainbow, the spirit of

the small boy is not exactly intoxicated with art and culture, the

cause certainly does not lie in universal grayness or the mere starving

of his senses. It lies in the fact that the colors are presented in the

wrong connection, on the wrong scale, and, above all, from the wrong

motive. It is not colors he lacks, but a philosophy of colors. In

short, there is nothing wrong with Reckitt's Blue except that it is not

Reckitt's. Blue does not belong to Reckitt, but to the sky; black does

not belong to Day and Martin, but to the abyss. Even the finest posters

are only very little things on a very large scale. There is something

specially irritant in this way about the iteration of advertisements of

mustard: a condiment, a small luxury; a thing in its nature not to be

taken in quantity. There is a special irony in these starving streets

to see such a great deal of mustard to such very little meat. Yellow is

a bright pigment; mustard is a pungent pleasure. But to look at these

seas of yellow is to be like a man who should swallow gallons of

mustard. He would either die, or lose the taste of mustard altogether.

Now suppose we compare these gigantic trivialities on the hoardings

with those tiny and tremendous pictures in which the mediaevals

recorded their dreams; little pictures where the blue sky is hardly

longer than a single sapphire, and the fires of judgment only a pigmy

patch of gold. The difference here is not merely that poster art is in

its nature more hasty than illumination art; it is not even merely that

the ancient artist was serving the Lord while the modern artist is

serving the lords. It is that the old artist contrived to convey an

impression that colors really were significant and precious things,

like jewels and talismanic stones. The color was often arbitrary; but

it was always authoritative. If a bird was blue, if a tree was golden,

if a fish was silver, if a cloud was scarlet, the artist managed to

convey that these colors were important and almost painfully intense;

all the red red-hot and all the gold tried in the fire. Now that is the

spirit touching color which the schools must recover and protect if

they are really to give the children any imaginative appetite or

pleasure in the thing. It is not so much an indulgence in color; it is

rather, if anything, a sort of fiery thrift. It fenced in a green field

in heraldry as straitly as a green field in peasant proprietorship. It

would not fling away gold leaf any more than gold coin; it would not

heedlessly pour out purple or crimson, any more than it would spill

good wine or shed blameless blood. That is the hard task before

educationists in this special matter; they have to teach people to

relish colors like liquors. They have the heavy business of turning

drunkards into wine tasters. If even the twentieth century succeeds in

doing these things, it will almost catch up with the twelfth.

The principle covers, however, the whole of modern life. Morris and the

merely aesthetic mediaevalists always indicated that a crowd in the

time of Chaucer would have been brightly clad and glittering, compared

with a crowd in the time of Queen Victoria. I am not so sure that the

real distinction is here. There would be brown frocks of friars in the

first scene as well as brown bowlers of clerks in the second. There

would be purple plumes of factory girls in the second scene as well as

purple lenten vestments in the first. There would be white waistcoats

against white ermine; gold watch chains against gold lions. The real

difference is this: that the brown earth-color of the monk's coat was

instinctively chosen to express labor and humility, whereas the brown

color of the clerk's hat was not chosen to express anything. The monk

did mean to say that he robed himself in dust. I am sure the clerk does

not mean to say that he crowns himself with clay. He is not putting

dust on his head, as the only diadem of man. Purple, at once rich and

somber, does suggest a triumph temporarily eclipsed by a tragedy. But

the factory girl does not intend her hat to express a triumph

temporarily eclipsed by a tragedy; far from it. White ermine was meant

to express moral purity; white waistcoats were not. Gold lions do

suggest a flaming magnanimity; gold watch chains do not. The point is

not that we have lost the material hues, but that we have lost the

trick of turning them to the best advantage. We are not like children

who have lost their paint box and are left alone with a gray

lead-pencil. We are like children who have mixed all the colors in the

paint-box together and lost the paper of instructions. Even then (I do

not deny) one has some fun.

Now this abundance of colors and loss of a color scheme is a pretty

perfect parable of all that is wrong with our modern ideals and

especially with our modern education. It is the same with ethical

education, economic education, every sort of education. The growing

London child will find no lack of highly controversial teachers who

will teach him that geography means painting the map red; that

economics means taxing the foreigner, that patriotism means the

peculiarly un-English habit of flying a flag on Empire Day. In

mentioning these examples specially I do not mean to imply that there

are no similar crudities and popular fallacies upon the other political

side. I mention them because they constitute a very special and

arresting feature of the situation. I mean this, that there were always

Radical revolutionists; but now there are Tory revolutionists also. The

modern Conservative no longer conserves. He is avowedly an innovator.

Thus all the current defenses of the House of Lords which describe it

as a bulwark against the mob, are intellectually done for; the bottom

has fallen out of them; because on five or six of the most turbulent

topics of the day, the House of Lords is a mob itself; and exceedingly

likely to behave like one.

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Through all this chaos, then we come back once more to our main

conclusion. The true task of culture to-day is not a task of expansion,

but very decidedly of selection--and rejection. The educationist must

find a creed and teach it. Even if it be not a theological creed, it

must still be as fastidious and as firm as theology. In short, it must

be orthodox. The teacher may think it antiquated to have to decide

precisely between the faith of Calvin and of Laud, the faith of Aquinas

and of Swedenborg; but he still has to choose between the faith of

Kipling and of Shaw, between the world of Blatchford and of General

Booth. Call it, if you will, a narrow question whether your child shall

be brought up by the vicar or the minister or the popish priest. You

have still to face that larger, more liberal, more highly civilized

question, of whether he shall be brought up by Harms worth or by

Pearson, by Mr. Eustace Miles with his Simple Life or Mr. Peter Keary

with his Strenuous Life; whether he shall most eagerly read Miss Annie

S. Swan or Mr. Bart Kennedy; in short, whether he shall end up in the

mere violence of the S. D. F. , or in the mere vulgarity of the

Primrose League. They say that nowadays the creeds are crumbling; I

doubt it, but at least the sects are increasing; and education must now

be sectarian education, merely for practical purposes. Out of all this

throng of theories it must somehow select a theory; out of all these

thundering voices it must manage to hear a voice; out of all this awful

and aching battle of blinding lights, without one shadow to give shape

to them, it must manage somehow to trace and to track a star.

I have spoken so far of popular education, which began too vague and

vast and which therefore has accomplished little. But as it happens

there is in England something to compare it with. There is an

institution, or class of institutions, which began with the same

popular object, which has since followed a much narrower object, but

which had the great advantage that it did follow some object, unlike

our modern elementary schools.

In all these problems I should urge the solution which is positive, or,

as silly people say, "optimistic." I should set my face, that is,

against most of the solutions that are solely negative and

abolitionist. Most educators of the poor seem to think that they have

to teach the poor man not to drink. I should be quite content if they

teach him to drink; for it is mere ignorance about how to drink and

when to drink that is accountable for most of his tragedies. I do not

propose (like some of my revolutionary friends) that we should abolish

the public schools. I propose the much more lurid and desperate

experiment that we should make them public. I do not wish to make

Parliament stop working, but rather to make it work; not to shut up

churches, but rather to open them; not to put out the lamp of learning

or destroy the hedge of property, but only to make some rude effort to

make universities fairly universal and property decently proper.

In many cases, let it be remembered, such action is not merely going

back to the old ideal, but is even going back to the old reality. It

would be a great step forward for the gin shop to go back to the inn.

It is incontrovertibly true that to mediaevalize the public schools

would be to democratize the public schools. Parliament did once really

mean (as its name seems to imply) a place where people were allowed to

talk. It is only lately that the general increase of efficiency, that

is, of the Speaker, has made it mostly a place where people are

prevented from talking. The poor do not go to the modern church, but

they went to the ancient church all right; and if the common man in the

past had a grave respect for property, it may conceivably have been

because he sometimes had some of his own. I therefore can claim that I

have no vulgar itch of innovation in anything I say about any of these

institutions. Certainly I have none in that particular one which I am

now obliged to pick out of the list; a type of institution to which I

have genuine and personal reasons for being friendly and grateful: I

mean the great Tudor foundations, the public schools of England. They

have been praised for a great many things, mostly, I am sorry to say,

praised by themselves and their children. And yet for some reason no

one has ever praised them the one really convincing reason.

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The word success can of course be used in two senses. It may be used

with reference to a thing serving its immediate and peculiar purpose,

as of a wheel going around; or it can be used with reference to a thing

adding to the general welfare, as of a wheel being a useful discovery.

It is one thing to say that Smith's flying machine is a failure, and

quite another to say that Smith has failed to make a flying machine.

Now this is very broadly the difference between the old English public

schools and the new democratic schools. Perhaps the old public schools

are (as I personally think they are) ultimately weakening the country

rather than strengthening it, and are therefore, in that ultimate

sense, inefficient. But there is such a thing as being efficiently

inefficient. You can make your flying ship so that it flies, even if

you also make it so that it kills you. Now the public school system may

not work satisfactorily, but it works; the public schools may not

achieve what we want, but they achieve what they want. The popular

elementary schools do not in that sense achieve anything at all. It is

very difficult to point to any guttersnipe in the street and say that

he embodies the ideal for which popular education has been working, in

the sense that the fresh-faced, foolish boy in "Etons" does embody the

ideal for which the headmasters of Harrow and Winchester have been

working. The aristocratic educationists have the positive purpose of

turning out gentlemen, and they do turn out gentlemen, even when they

expel them. The popular educationists would say that they had the far

nobler idea of turning out citizens. I concede that it is a much nobler

idea, but where are the citizens? I know that the boy in "Etons" is

stiff with a rather silly and sentimental stoicism, called being a man

of the world. I do not fancy that the errand-boy is rigid with that

republican stoicism that is called being a citizen. The schoolboy will

really say with fresh and innocent hauteur, "I am an English

gentleman." I cannot so easily picture the errand-boy drawing up his

head to the stars and answering, "Romanus civis sum." Let it be granted

that our elementary teachers are teaching the very broadest code of

morals, while our great headmasters are teaching only the narrowest

code of manners. Let it be granted that both these things are being

taught. But only one of them is being learned.

It is always said that great reformers or masters of events can manage

to bring about some specific and practical reforms, but that they never

fulfill their visions or satisfy their souls. I believe there is a real

sense in which this apparent platitude is quite untrue. By a strange

inversion the political idealist often does not get what he asks for,

but does get what he wants. The silent pressure of his ideal lasts much

longer and reshapes the world much more than the actualities by which

he attempted to suggest it. What perishes is the letter, which he

thought so practical. What endures is the spirit, which he felt to be

unattainable and even unutterable. It is exactly his schemes that are

not fulfilled; it is exactly his vision that is fulfilled. Thus the ten

or twelve paper constitutions of the French Revolution, which seemed so

business-like to the framers of them, seem to us to have flown away on

the wind as the wildest fancies. What has not flown away, what is a

fixed fact in Europe, is the ideal and vision. The Republic, the idea

of a land full of mere citizens all with some minimum of manners and

minimum of wealth, the vision of the eighteenth century, the reality of

the twentieth. So I think it will generally be with the creator of

social things, desirable or undesirable. All his schemes will fail, all

his tools break in his hands. His compromises will collapse, his

concessions will be useless. He must brace himself to bear his fate; he

shall have nothing but his heart's desire.

Now if one may compare very small things with very great, one may say

that the English aristocratic schools can claim something of the same

sort of success and solid splendor as the French democratic politics.

At least they can claim the same sort of superiority over the

distracted and fumbling attempts of modern England to establish

democratic education. Such success as has attended the public schoolboy

throughout the Empire, a success exaggerated indeed by himself, but

still positive and a fact of a certain indisputable shape and size, has

been due to the central and supreme circumstance that the managers of

our public schools did know what sort of boy they liked. They wanted

something and they got something; instead of going to work in the

broad-minded manner and wanting everything and getting nothing.

The only thing in question is the quality of the thing they got. There

is something highly maddening in the circumstance that when modern

people attack an institution that really does demand reform, they

always attack it for the wrong reasons. Thus many opponents of our

public schools, imagining themselves to be very democratic, have

exhausted themselves in an unmeaning attack upon the study of Greek. I

can understand how Greek may be regarded as useless, especially by

those thirsting to throw themselves into the cut throat commerce which

is the negation of citizenship; but I do not understand how it can be

considered undemocratic. I quite understand why Mr. Carnegie has a

hatred of Greek. It is obscurely founded on the firm and sound

impression that in any self-governing Greek city he would have been

killed. But I cannot comprehend why any chance democrat, say Mr.

Quelch, or Mr. Will Crooks, I or Mr. John M. Robertson, should be

opposed to people learning the Greek alphabet, which was the alphabet

of liberty. Why should Radicals dislike Greek? In that language is

written all the earliest and, Heaven knows, the most heroic history of

the Radical party. Why should Greek disgust a democrat, when the very

word democrat is Greek?

A similar mistake, though a less serious one, is merely attacking the

athletics of public schools as something promoting animalism and

brutality. Now brutality, in the only immoral sense, is not a vice of

the English public schools. There is much moral bullying, owing to the

general lack of moral courage in the public-school atmosphere. These

schools do, upon the whole, encourage physical courage; but they do not

merely discourage moral courage, they forbid it. The ultimate result of

the thing is seen in the egregious English officer who cannot even

endure to wear a bright uniform except when it is blurred and hidden in

the smoke of battle. This, like all the affectations of our present

plutocracy, is an entirely modern thing. It was unknown to the old

aristocrats. The Black Prince would certainly have asked that any

knight who had the courage to lift his crest among his enemies, should

also have the courage to lift it among his friends. As regards moral

courage, then it is not so much that the public schools support it

feebly, as that they suppress it firmly. But physical courage they do,

on the whole, support; and physical courage is a magnificent

fundamental. The one great, wise Englishman of the eighteenth century

said truly that if a man lost that virtue he could never be sure of

keeping any other. Now it is one of the mean and morbid modern lies

that physical courage is connected with cruelty. The Tolstoian and

Kiplingite are nowhere more at one than in maintaining this. They have,

I believe, some small sectarian quarrel with each other, the one saying

that courage must be abandoned because it is connected with cruelty,

and the other maintaining that cruelty is charming because it is a part

of courage. But it is all, thank God, a lie. An energy and boldness of

body may make a man stupid or reckless or dull or drunk or hungry, but

it does not make him spiteful. And we may admit heartily (without

joining in that perpetual praise which public-school men are always

pouring upon themselves) that this does operate to the removal of mere

evil cruelty in the public schools. English public school life is

extremely like English public life, for which it is the preparatory

school. It is like it specially in this, that things are either very

open, common and conventional, or else are very secret indeed. Now

there is cruelty in public schools, just as there is kleptomania and

secret drinking and vices without a name. But these things do not

flourish in the full daylight and common consciousness of the school,

and no more does cruelty. A tiny trio of sullen-looking boys gather in

corners and seem to have some ugly business always; it may be indecent

literature, it may be the beginning of drink, it may occasionally be

cruelty to little boys. But on this stage the bully is not a braggart.

The proverb says that bullies are always cowardly, but these bullies

are more than cowardly; they are shy.

As a third instance of the wrong form of revolt against the public

schools, I may mention the habit of using the word aristocracy with a

double implication. To put the plain truth as briefly as possible, if

aristocracy means rule by a rich ring, England has aristocracy and the

English public schools support it. If it means rule by ancient families

or flawless blood, England has not got aristocracy, and the public

schools systematically destroy it. In these circles real aristocracy,

like real democracy, has become bad form. A modern fashionable host

dare not praise his ancestry; it would so often be an insult to half

the other oligarchs at table, who have no ancestry. We have said he has

not the moral Courage to wear his uniform; still less has he the moral

courage to wear his coat-of-arms. The whole thing now is only a vague

hotch-potch of nice and nasty gentlemen. The nice gentleman never

refers to anyone else's father, the nasty gentleman never refers to his

own. That is the only difference, the rest is the public-school manner.

But Eton and Harrow have to be aristocratic because they consist so

largely of parvenues. The public school is not a sort of refuge for

aristocrats, like an asylum, a place where they go in and never come

out. It is a factory for aristocrats; they come out without ever having

perceptibly gone in. The poor little private schools, in their

old-world, sentimental, feudal style, used to stick up a notice, "For

the Sons of Gentlemen only." If the public schools stuck up a notice it

ought to be inscribed, "For the Fathers of Gentlemen only." In two

generations they can do the trick.

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These are the false accusations; the accusation of classicism, the

accusation of cruelty, and the accusation of an exclusiveness based on

perfection of pedigree. English public-school boys are not pedants,

they are not torturers; and they are not, in the vast majority of

cases, people fiercely proud of their ancestry, or even people with any

ancestry to be proud of. They are taught to be courteous, to be good

tempered, to be brave in a bodily sense, to be clean in a bodily sense;

they are generally kind to animals, generally civil to servants, and to

anyone in any sense their equal, the jolliest companions on earth. Is

there then anything wrong in the public-school ideal? I think we all

feel there is something very wrong in it, but a blinding network of

newspaper phraseology obscures and entangles us; so that it is hard to

trace to its beginning, beyond all words and phrases. the faults in

this great English achievement.

Surely, when all is said, the ultimate objection to the English public

school is its utterly blatant and indecent disregard of the duty of

telling the truth. I know there does still linger among maiden ladies

in remote country houses a notion that English schoolboys are taught to

tell the truth, but it cannot be maintained seriously for a moment.

Very occasionally, very vaguely, English schoolboys are told not to

tell lies, which is a totally different thing. I may silently support

all the obscene fictions and forgeries in the universe, without once

telling a lie. I may wear another man's coat, steal another man's wit,

apostatize to another man's creed, or poison another man's coffee, all

without ever telling a lie. But no English school-boy is ever taught to

tell the truth, for the very simple reason that he is never taught to

desire the truth. From the very first he is taught to be totally

careless about whether a fact is a fact; he is taught to care only

whether the fact can be used on his "side" when he is engaged in

"playing the game." He takes sides in his Union debating society to

settle whether Charles I ought to have been killed, with the same

solemn and pompous frivolity with which he takes sides in the cricket

field to decide whether Rugby or Westminster shall win. He is never

allowed to admit the abstract notion of the truth, that the match is a

matter of what may happen, but that Charles I is a matter of what did

happen--or did not. He is Liberal or Tory at the general election

exactly as he is Oxford or Cambridge at the boat race. He knows that

sport deals with the unknown; he has not even a notion that politics

should deal with the known. If anyone really doubts this self-evident

proposition, that the public schools definitely discourage the love of

truth, there is one fact which I should think would settle him. England

is the country of the Party System, and it has always been chiefly run

by public-school men. Is there anyone out of Hanwell who will maintain

that the Party System, whatever its conveniences or inconveniences,

could have been created by people particularly fond of truth?

The very English happiness on this point is itself a hypocrisy. When a

man really tells the truth, the first truth he tells is that he himself

is a liar. David said in his haste, that is, in his honesty, that all

men are liars. It was afterwards, in some leisurely official

explanation, that he said the Kings of Israel at least told the truth.

When Lord Curzon was Viceroy he delivered a moral lecture to the

Indians on their reputed indifference to veracity, to actuality and

intellectual honor. A great many people indignantly discussed whether

orientals deserved to receive this rebuke; whether Indians were indeed

in a position to receive such severe admonition. No one seemed to ask,

as I should venture to ask, whether Lord Curzon was in a position to

give it. He is an ordinary party politician; a party politician means a

politician who might have belonged to either party. Being such a

person, he must again and again, at every twist and turn of party

strategy, either have deceived others or grossly deceived himself. I do

not know the East; nor do I like what I know. I am quite ready to

believe that when Lord Curzon went out he found a very false

atmosphere. I only say it must have been something startlingly and

chokingly false if it was falser than that English atmosphere from

which he came. The English Parliament actually cares for everything

except veracity. The public-school man is kind, courageous, polite,

clean, companionable; but, in the most awful sense of the words, the

truth is not in him.

This weakness of untruthfulness in the English public schools, in the

English political system, and to some extent in the English character,

is a weakness which necessarily produces a curious crop of

superstitions, of lying legends, of evident delusions clung to through

low spiritual self-indulgence. There are so many of these public-school

superstitions that I have here only space for one of them, which may be

called the superstition of soap. It appears to have been shared by the

ablutionary Pharisees, who resembled the English public-school

aristocrats in so many respects: in their care about club rules and

traditions, in their offensive optimism at the expense of other people,

and above all in their unimaginative plodding patriotism in the worst

interests of their country. Now the old human common sense about

washing is that it is a great pleasure. Water (applied externally) is a

splendid thing, like wine. Sybarites bathe in wine, and Nonconformists

drink water; but we are not concerned with these frantic exceptions.

Washing being a pleasure, it stands to reason that rich people can

afford it more than poor people, and as long as this was recognized all

was well; and it was very right that rich people should offer baths to

poor people, as they might offer any other agreeable thing-- a drink or

a donkey ride. But one dreadful day, somewhere about the middle of the

nineteenth century, somebody discovered (somebody pretty well off) the

two great modern truths, that washing is a virtue in the rich and

therefore a duty in the poor. For a duty is a virtue that one can't do.

And a virtue is generally a duty that one can do quite easily; like the

bodily cleanliness of the upper classes. But in the public-school

tradition of public life, soap has become creditable simply because it

is pleasant. Baths are represented as a part of the decay of the Roman

Empire; but the same baths are represented as part of the energy and

rejuvenation of the British Empire. There are distinguished public

school men, bishops, dons, headmasters, and high politicians, who, in

the course of the eulogies which from time to time they pass upon

themselves, have actually identified physical cleanliness with moral

purity. They say (if I remember rightly) that a public-school man is

clean inside and out. As if everyone did not know that while saints can

afford to be dirty, seducers have to be clean. As if everyone did not

know that the harlot must be clean, because it is her business to

captivate, while the good wife may be dirty, because it is her business

to clean. As if we did not all know that whenever God's thunder cracks

above us, it is very likely indeed to find the simplest man in a muck

cart and the most complex blackguard in a bath.

There are other instances, of course, of this oily trick of turning the

pleasures of a gentleman into the virtues of an Anglo-Saxon. Sport,

like soap, is an admirable thing, but, like soap, it is an agreeable

thing. And it does not sum up all mortal merits to be a sportsman

playing the game in a world where it is so often necessary to be a

workman doing the work. By all means let a gentleman congratulate

himself that he has not lost his natural love of pleasure, as against

the blase, and unchildlike. But when one has the childlike joy it is

best to have also the childlike unconsciousness; and I do not think we

should have special affection for the little boy who ever lastingly

explained that it was his duty to play Hide and Seek and one of his

family virtues to be prominent in Puss in the Corner.

Another such irritating hypocrisy is the oligarchic attitude towards

mendicity as against organized charity. Here again, as in the case of

cleanliness and of athletics, the attitude would be perfectly human and

intelligible if it were not maintained as a merit. Just as the obvious

thing about soap is that it is a convenience, so the obvious thing

about beggars is that they are an inconvenience. The rich would deserve

very little blame if they simply said that they never dealt directly

with beggars, because in modern urban civilization it is impossible to

deal directly with beggars; or if not impossible, at least very

difficult. But these people do not refuse money to beggars on the

ground that such charity is difficult. They refuse it on the grossly

hypocritical ground that such charity is easy. They say, with the most

grotesque gravity, "Anyone can put his hand in his pocket and give a

poor man a penny; but we, philanthropists, go home and brood and

travail over the poor man's troubles until we have discovered exactly

what jail, reformatory, workhouse, or lunatic asylum it will really be

best for him to go to." This is all sheer lying. They do not brood

about the man when they get home, and if they did it would not alter

the original fact that their motive for discouraging beggars is the

perfectly rational one that beggars are a bother. A man may easily be

forgiven for not doing this or that incidental act of charity,

especially when the question is as genuinely difficult as is the case

of mendicity. But there is something quite pestilently Pecksniffian

about shrinking from a hard task on the plea that it is not hard

enough. If any man will really try talking to the ten beggars who come

to his door he will soon find out whether it is really so much easier

than the labor of writing a check for a hospital.

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For this deep and disabling reason therefore, its cynical and abandoned

indifference to the truth, the English public school does not provide

us with the ideal that we require. We can only ask its modern critics

to remember that right or wrong the thing can be done; the factory is

working, the wheels are going around, the gentlemen are being produced,

with their soap, cricket and organized charity all complete. And in

this, as we have said before, the public school really has an advantage

over all the other educational schemes of our time. You can pick out a

public-school man in any of the many companies into which they stray,

from a Chinese opium den to a German Jewish dinner-party. But I doubt

if you could tell which little match girl had been brought up by

undenominational religion and which by secular education. The great

English aristocracy which has ruled us since the Reformation is really,

in this sense, a model to the moderns. It did have an ideal, and

therefore it has produced a reality.

We may repeat here that these pages propose mainly to show one thing:

that progress ought to be based on principle, while our modern progress

is mostly based on precedent. We go, not by what may be affirmed in

theory, but by what has been already admitted in practice. That is why

the Jacobites are the last Tories in history with whom a high-spirited

person can have much sympathy. They wanted a specific thing; they were

ready to go forward for it, and so they were also ready to go back for

it. But modern Tories have only the dullness of defending situations

that they had not the excitement of creating. Revolutionists make a

reform, Conservatives only conserve the reform. They never reform the

reform, which is often very much wanted. Just as the rivalry of

armaments is only a sort of sulky plagiarism, so the rivalry of parties

is only a sort of sulky inheritance. Men have votes, so women must soon

have votes; poor children are taught by force, so they must soon be fed

by force; the police shut public houses by twelve o'clock, so soon they

must shut them by eleven o'clock; children stop at school till they are

fourteen, so soon they will stop till they are forty. No gleam of

reason, no momentary return to first principles, no abstract asking of

any obvious question, can interrupt this mad and monotonous gallop of

mere progress by precedent. It is a good way to prevent real

revolution. By this logic of events, the Radical gets as much into a

rut as the Conservative. We meet one hoary old lunatic who says his

grandfather told him to stand by one stile. We meet another hoary old

lunatic who says his grandfather told him only to walk along one lane.

I say we may repeat here this primary part of the argument, because we

have just now come to the place where it is most startlingly and

strongly shown. The final proof that our elementary schools have no

definite ideal of their own is the fact that they so openly imitate the

ideals of the public schools. In the elementary schools we have all the

ethical prejudices and exaggerations of Eton and Harrow carefully

copied for people to whom they do not even roughly apply. We have the

same wildly disproportionate doctrine of the effect of physical

cleanliness on moral character. Educators and educational politicians

declare, amid warm cheers, that cleanliness is far more important than

all the squabbles about moral and religious training. It would really

seem that so long as a little boy washes his hands it does not matter

whether he is washing off his mother's jam or his brother's gore. We

have the same grossly insincere pretense that sport always encourages a

sense of honor, when we know that it often ruins it. Above all, we have

the same great upperclass assumption that things are done best by large

institutions handling large sums of money and ordering everybody about;

and that trivial and impulsive charity is in some way contemptible. As

Mr. Blatchford says, "The world does not want piety, but soap-- and

Socialism." Piety is one of the popular virtues, whereas soap and

Socialism are two hobbies of the upper middle class.

These "healthy" ideals, as they are called, which our politicians and

schoolmasters have borrowed from the aristocratic schools and applied

to the democratic, are by no means particularly appropriate to an

impoverished democracy. A vague admiration for organized government and

a vague distrust of individual aid cannot be made to fit in at all into

the lives of people among whom kindness means lending a saucepan and

honor means keeping out of the workhouse. It resolves itself either

into discouraging that system of prompt and patchwork generosity which

is a daily glory of the poor, or else into hazy advice to people who

have no money not to give it recklessly away. Nor is the exaggerated

glory of athletics, defensible enough in dealing with the rich who, if

they did not romp and race, would eat and drink unwholesomely, by any

means so much to the point when applied to people, most of whom will

take a great deal of exercise anyhow, with spade or hammer, pickax or

saw. And for the third case, of washing, it is obvious that the same

sort of rhetoric about corporeal daintiness which is proper to an

ornamental class cannot, merely as it stands, be applicable to a

dustman. A gentleman is expected to be substantially spotless all the

time. But it is no more discreditable for a scavenger to be dirty than

for a deep-sea diver to be wet. A sweep is no more disgraced when he is

covered with soot than Michael Angelo when he is covered with clay, or

Bayard when he is covered with blood. Nor have these extenders of the

public-school tradition done or suggested anything by way of a

substitute for the present snobbish system which makes cleanliness

almost impossible to the poor; I mean the general ritual of linen and

the wearing of the cast-off clothes of the rich. One man moves into

another man's clothes as he moves into another man's house. No wonder

that our educationists are not horrified at a man picking up the

aristocrat's second-hand trousers, when they themselves have only taken

up the aristocrat's second-hand ideas.

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There is one thing at least of which there is never so much as a

whisper inside the popular schools; and that is the opinion of the

people The only persons who seem to have nothing to do with the

education of the children are the parents. Yet the English poor have

very definite traditions in many ways. They are hidden under

embarrassment and irony; and those psychologists who have disentangled

them talk of them as very strange, barbaric and secretive things But,

as a matter of fact, the traditions of the poor are mostly simply the

traditions of humanity, a thing which many of us have not seen for some

time. For instance, workingmen have a tradition that if one is talking

about a vile thing it is better to talk of it in coarse language; one

is the less likely to be seduced into excusing it. But mankind had this

tradition also, until the Puritans and their children, the Ibsenites,

started the opposite idea, that it does not matter what you say so long

as you say it with long words and a long face. Or again, the educated

classes have tabooed most jesting about personal appearance; but in

doing this they taboo not only the humor of the slums, but more than

half the healthy literature of the world; they put polite nose-bags on

the noses of Punch and Bardolph, Stiggins and Cyrano de Bergerac.

Again, the educated classes have adopted a hideous and heathen custom

of considering death as too dreadful to talk about, and letting it

remain a secret for each person, like some private malformation. The

poor, on the contrary, make a great gossip and display about

bereavement; and they are right. They have hold of a truth of

psychology which is at the back of all the funeral customs of the

children of men. The way to lessen sorrow is to make a lot of it. The

way to endure a painful crisis is to insist very much that it is a

crisis; to permit people who must feel sad at least to feel important.

In this the poor are simply the priests of the universal civilization;

and in their stuffy feasts and solemn chattering there is the smell of

the baked meats of Hamlet and the dust and echo of the funeral games of

Patroclus.

The things philanthropists barely excuse (or do not excuse) in the life

of the laboring classes are simply the things we have to excuse in all

the greatest monuments of man. It may be that the laborer is as gross

as Shakespeare or as garrulous as Homer; that if he is religious he

talks nearly as much about hell as Dante; that if he is worldly he

talks nearly as much about drink as Dickens. Nor is the poor man

without historic support if he thinks less of that ceremonial washing

which Christ dismissed, and rather more of that ceremonial drinking

which Christ specially sanctified. The only difference between the poor

man of to-day and the saints and heroes of history is that which in all

classes separates the common man who can feel things from the great man

who can express them. What he feels is merely the heritage of man. Now

nobody expects of course that the cabmen and coal-heavers can be

complete instructors of their children any more than the squires and

colonels and tea merchants are complete instructors of their children.

There must be an educational specialist in loco parentis. But the

master at Harrow is in loco parentis; the master in Hoxton is rather

contra parentem. The vague politics of the squire, the vaguer virtues

of the colonel, the soul and spiritual yearnings of a tea merchant,

are, in veritable practice, conveyed to the children of these people at

the English public schools. But I wish here to ask a very plain and

emphatic question. Can anyone alive even pretend to point out any way

in which these special virtues and traditions of the poor are

reproduced in the education of the poor? I do not wish the coster's

irony to appeal as coarsely in the school as it does in the tap room;

but does it appear at all? Is the child taught to sympathize at all

with his father's admirable cheerfulness and slang? I do not expect the

pathetic, eager pietas of the mother, with her funeral clothes and

funeral baked meats, to be exactly imitated in the educational system;

but has it any influence at all on the educational system? Does any

elementary schoolmaster accord it even an instant's consideration or

respect? I do not expect the schoolmaster to hate hospitals and C.O.S.

centers so much as the schoolboy's father; but does he hate them at

all? Does he sympathize in the least with the poor man's point of honor

against official institutions? Is it not quite certain that the

ordinary elementary schoolmaster will think it not merely natural but

simply conscientious to eradicate all these rugged legends of a

laborious people, and on principle to preach soap and Socialism against

beer and liberty? In the lower classes the school master does not work

for the parent, but against the parent. Modern education means handing

down the customs of the minority, and rooting out the customs of the

majority. Instead of their Christlike charity, their Shakespearean

laughter and their high Homeric reverence for the dead, the poor have

imposed on them mere pedantic copies of the prejudices of the remote

rich. They must think a bathroom a necessity because to the lucky it is

a luxury; they must swing Swedish clubs because their masters are

afraid of English cudgels; and they must get over their prejudice

against being fed by the parish, because aristocrats feel no shame

about being fed by the nation.

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It is the same in the case of girls. I am often solemnly asked what I

think of the new ideas about female education. But there are no new

ideas about female education. There is not, there never has been, even

the vestige of a new idea. All the educational reformers did was to ask

what was being done to boys and then go and do it to girls; just as

they asked what was being taught to young squires and then taught it to

young chimney sweeps. What they call new ideas are very old ideas in

the wrong place. Boys play football, why shouldn't girls play football;

boys have school colors, why shouldn't girls have school-colors; boys

go in hundreds to day-schools, why shouldn't girls go in hundreds to

day-schools; boys go to Oxford, why shouldn't girls go to Oxford--in

short, boys grow mustaches, why shouldn't girls grow mustaches--that is

about their notion of a new idea. There is no brain-work in the thing

at all; no root query of what sex is, of whether it alters this or

that, and why, anymore than there is any imaginative grip of the humor

and heart of the populace in the popular education. There is nothing

but plodding, elaborate, elephantine imitation. And just as in the case

of elementary teaching, the cases are of a cold and reckless

inappropriateness. Even a savage could see that bodily things, at

least, which are good for a man are very likely to be bad for a woman.

Yet there is no boy's game, however brutal, which these mild lunatics

have not promoted among girls. To take a stronger case, they give girls

very heavy home-work; never reflecting that all girls have home-work

already in their homes. It is all a part of the same silly subjugation;

there must be a hard stick-up collar round the neck of a woman, because

it is already a nuisance round the neck of a man. Though a Saxon serf,

if he wore that collar of cardboard, would ask for his collar of brass.

It will then be answered, not without a sneer, "And what would you

prefer? Would you go back to the elegant early Victorian female, with

ringlets and smelling-bottle, doing a little in water colors, dabbling

a little in Italian, playing a little on the harp, writing in vulgar

albums and painting on senseless screens? Do you prefer that?" To which

I answer, "Emphatically, yes." I solidly prefer it to the new female

education, for this reason, that I can see in it an intellectual

design, while there is none in the other. I am by no means sure that

even in point of practical fact that elegant female would not have been

more than a match for most of the inelegant females. I fancy Jane

Austen was stronger, sharper and shrewder than Charlotte Bronte; I am

quite certain she was stronger, sharper and shrewder than George Eliot.

She could do one thing neither of them could do: she could coolly and

sensibly describe a man. I am not sure that the old great lady who

could only smatter Italian was not more vigorous than the new great

lady who can only stammer American; nor am I certain that the bygone

duchesses who were scarcely successful when they painted Melrose Abbey,

were so much more weak-minded than the modern duchesses who paint only

their own faces, and are bad at that. But that is not the point. What

was the theory, what was the idea, in their old, weak water-colors and

their shaky Italian? The idea was the same which in a ruder rank

expressed itself in home-made wines and hereditary recipes; and which

still, in a thousand unexpected ways, can be found clinging to the

women of the poor. It was the idea I urged in the second part of this

book: that the world must keep one great amateur, lest we all become

artists and perish. Somebody must renounce all specialist conquests,

that she may conquer all the conquerors. That she may be a queen of

life, she must not be a private soldier in it. I do not think the

elegant female with her bad Italian was a perfect product, any more

than I think the slum woman talking gin and funerals is a perfect

product; alas! there are few perfect products. But they come from a

comprehensible idea; and the new woman comes from nothing and nowhere.

It is right to have an ideal, it is right to have the right ideal, and

these two have the right ideal. The slum mother with her funerals is

the degenerate daughter of Antigone, the obstinate priestess of the

household gods. The lady talking bad Italian was the decayed tenth

cousin of Portia, the great and golden Italian lady, the Renascence

amateur of life, who could be a barrister because she could be

anything. Sunken and neglected in the sea of modern monotony and

imitation, the types hold tightly to their original truths. Antigone,

ugly, dirty and often drunken, will still bury her father. The elegant

female, vapid and fading away to nothing, still feels faintly the

fundamental difference between herself and her husband: that he must be

Something in the City, that she may be everything in the country.

There was a time when you and I and all of us were all very close to

God; so that even now the color of a pebble (or a paint), the smell of

a flower (or a firework), comes to our hearts with a kind of authority

and certainty; as if they were fragments of a muddled message, or

features of a forgotten face. To pour that fiery simplicity upon the

whole of life is the only real aim of education; and closest to the

child comes the woman--she understands. To say what she understands is

beyond me; save only this, that it is not a solemnity. Rather it is a

towering levity, an uproarious amateurishness of the universe, such as

we felt when we were little, and would as soon sing as garden, as soon

paint as run. To smatter the tongues of men and angels, to dabble in

the dreadful sciences, to juggle with pillars and pyramids and toss up

the planets like balls, this is that inner audacity and indifference

which the human soul, like a conjurer catching oranges, must keep up

forever. This is that insanely frivolous thing we call sanity. And the

elegant female, drooping her ringlets over her water-colors, knew it

and acted on it. She was juggling with frantic and flaming suns. She

was maintaining the bold equilibrium of inferiorities which is the most

mysterious of superiorities and perhaps the most unattainable. She was

maintaining the prime truth of woman, the universal mother: that if a

thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.

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A cultivated Conservative friend of mine once exhibited great distress

because in a gay moment I once called Edmund Burke an atheist. I need

scarcely say that the remark lacked something of biographical

precision; it was meant to. Burke was certainly not an atheist in his

conscious cosmic theory, though he had not a special and flaming faith

in God, like Robespierre. Nevertheless, the remark had reference to a

truth which it is here relevant to repeat. I mean that in the quarrel

over the French Revolution, Burke did stand for the atheistic attitude

and mode of argument, as Robespierre stood for the theistic. The

Revolution appealed to the idea of an abstract and eternal justice,

beyond all local custom or convenience. If there are commands of God,

then there must be rights of man. Here Burke made his brilliant

diversion; he did not attack the Robespierre doctrine with the old

mediaeval doctrine of jus divinum (which, like the Robespierre

doctrine, was theistic), he attacked it with the modern argument of

scientific relativity; in short, the argument of evolution. He

suggested that humanity was everywhere molded by or fitted to its

environment and institutions; in fact, that each people practically

got, not only the tyrant it deserved, but the tyrant it ought to have.

"I know nothing of the rights of men," he said, "but I know something

of the rights of Englishmen." There you have the essential atheist. His

argument is that we have got some protection by natural accident and

growth; and why should we profess to think beyond it, for all the world

as if we were the images of God! We are born under a House of Lords, as

birds under a house of leaves; we live under a monarchy as niggers live

under a tropic sun; it is not their fault if they are slaves, and it is

not ours if we are snobs. Thus, long before Darwin struck his great

blow at democracy, the essential of the Darwinian argument had been

already urged against the French Revolution. Man, said Burke in effect,

must adapt himself to everything, like an animal; he must not try to

alter everything, like an angel. The last weak cry of the pious,

pretty, half-artificial optimism and deism of the eighteenth century

carne in the voice of Sterne, saying, "God tempers the wind to the

shorn lamb." And Burke, the iron evolutionist, essentially answered,

"No; God tempers the shorn lamb to the wind." It is the lamb that has

to adapt himself. That is, he either dies or becomes a particular kind

of lamb who likes standing in a draught.

The subconscious popular instinct against Darwinism was not a mere

offense at the grotesque notion of visiting one's grandfather in a cage

in the Regent's Park. Men go in for drink, practical jokes and many

other grotesque things; they do not much mind making beasts of

themselves, and would not much mind having beasts made of their

forefathers. The real instinct was much deeper and much more valuable.

It was this: that when once one begins to think of man as a shifting

and alterable thing, it is always easy for the strong and crafty to

twist him into new shapes for all kinds of unnatural purposes. the

popular instinct sees in such developments the possibility of backs

bowed and hunch-backed for their burden, or limbs twisted for their

task. It has a very well-grounded guess that whatever is done swiftly

and systematically will mostly be done be a successful class and almost

solely in their interests. It has therefore a vision of inhuman hybrids

and half-human experiments much in the style of Mr. Wells's "Island of

Dr. Moreau." The rich man may come to breeding a tribe of dwarfs to be

his jockeys, and a tribe of giants to be his hall-porters. Grooms might

be born bow-legged and tailors born cross-legged; perfumers might have

long, large noses and a crouching attitude, like hounds of scent; and

professional wine-tasters might have the horrible expression of one

tasting wine stamped upon their faces as infants. Whatever wild image

one employs it cannot keep pace with the panic of the human fancy, when

once it supposes that the fixed type called man could be changed. If

some millionaire wanted arms, some porter must grow ten arms like an

octopus; if he wants legs, some messenger-boy must go with a hundred

trotting legs like a centipede. In the distorted mirror of hypothesis,

that is, of the unknown, men can dimly see such monstrous and evil

shapes; men run all to eye, or all to fingers, with nothing left but

one nostril or one ear. That is the nightmare with which the mere

notion of adaptation threatens us. That is the nightmare that is not so

very far from the reality.

It will be said that not the wildest evolutionist really asks that we

should become in any way unhuman or copy any other animal. Pardon me,

that is exactly what not merely the wildest evolutionists urge, but

some of the tamest evolutionists too. There has risen high in recent

history an important cultus which bids fair to be the religion of the

future--which means the religion of those few weak-minded people who

live in the future. It is typical of our time that it has to look for

its god through a microscope; and our time has marked a definite

adoration of the insect. Like most things we call new, of course, it is

not at all new as an idea; it is only new as an idolatry. Virgil takes

bees seriously but I doubt if he would have kept bees as carefully as

he wrote about them. The wise king told the sluggard to watch the ant,

a charming occupation--for a sluggard. But in our own time has appeared

a very different tone, and more than one great man, as well as

numberless intelligent men, have in our time seriously suggested that

we should study the insect because we are his inferiors. The old

moralists merely took the virtues of man and distributed them quite

decoratively and arbitrarily among the animals. The ant was an almost

heraldic symbol of industry, as the lion was of courage, or, for the

matter of that, the pelican of charity. But if the mediaevals had been

convinced that a lion was not courageous, they would have dropped the

lion and kept the courage; if the pelican is not charitable, they would

say, so much the worse for the pelican. The old moralists, I say,

permitted the ant to enforce and typify man's morality; they never

allowed the ant to upset it. They used the ant for industry as the lark

for punctuality; they looked up at the flapping birds and down at the

crawling insects for a homely lesson. But we have lived to see a sect

that does not look down at the insects, but looks up at the insects,

that asks us essentially to bow down and worship beetles, like ancient

Egyptians.

Maurice Maeterlinck is a man of unmistakable genius, and genius always

carries a magnifying glass. In the terrible crystal of his lens we have

seen the bees not as a little yellow swarm, but rather in golden armies

and hierarchies of warriors and queens. Imagination perpetually peers

and creeps further down the avenues and vistas in the tubes of science,

and one fancies every frantic reversal of proportions; the earwig

striding across the echoing plain like an elephant, or the grasshopper

coming roaring above our roofs like a vast aeroplane, as he leaps from

Hertfordshire to Surrey. One seems to enter in a dream a temple of

enormous entomology, whose architecture is based on something wilder

than arms or backbones; in which the ribbed columns have the

half-crawling look of dim and monstrous caterpillars; or the dome is a

starry spider hung horribly in the void. There is one of the modern

works of engineering that gives one something of this nameless fear of

the exaggerations of an underworld; and that is the curious curved

architecture of the under ground railway, commonly called the Twopenny

Tube. Those squat archways, without any upright line or pillar, look as

if they had been tunneled by huge worms who have never learned to lift

their heads It is the very underground palace of the Serpent, the

spirit of changing shape and color, that is the enemy of man.

But it is not merely by such strange aesthetic suggestions that writers

like Maeterlinck have influenced us in the matter; there is also an

ethical side to the business. The upshot of M. Maeterlinck's book on

bees is an admiration, one might also say an envy, of their collective

spirituality; of the fact that they live only for something which he

calls the Soul of the Hive. And this admiration for the communal

morality of insects is expressed in many other modern writers in

various quarters and shapes; in Mr. Benjamin Kidd's theory of living

only for the evolutionary future of our race, and in the great interest

of some Socialists in ants, which they generally prefer to bees, I

suppose, because they are not so brightly colored. Not least among the

hundred evidences of this vague insectolatry are the floods of flattery

poured by modern people on that energetic nation of the Far East of

which it has been said that "Patriotism is its only religion"; or, in

other words, that it lives only for the Soul of the Hive. When at long

intervals of the centuries Christendom grows weak, morbid or skeptical,

and mysterious Asia begins to move against us her dim populations and

to pour them westward like a dark movement of matter, in such cases it

has been very common to compare the invasion to a plague of lice or

incessant armies of locusts. The Eastern armies were indeed like

insects; in their blind, busy destructiveness, in their black nihilism

of personal outlook, in their hateful indifference to individual life

and love, in their base belief in mere numbers, in their pessimistic

courage and their atheistic patriotism, the riders and raiders of the

East are indeed like all the creeping things of the earth. But never

before, I think, have Christians called a Turk a locust and meant it as

a compliment. Now for the first time we worship as well as fear; and

trace with adoration that enormous form advancing vast and vague out of

Asia, faintly discernible amid the mystic clouds of winged creatures

hung over the wasted lands, thronging the skies like thunder and

discoloring the skies like rain; Beelzebub, the Lord of Flies.

In resisting this horrible theory of the Soul of the Hive, we of

Christendom stand not for ourselves, but for all humanity; for the

essential and distinctive human idea that one good and happy man is an

end in himself, that a soul is worth saving. Nay, for those who like

such biological fancies it might well be said that we stand as chiefs

and champions of a whole section of nature, princes of the house whose

cognizance is the backbone, standing for the milk of the individual

mother and the courage of the wandering cub, representing the pathetic

chivalry of the dog, the humor and perversity of cats, the affection of

the tranquil horse, the loneliness of the lion. It is more to the

point, however, to urge that this mere glorification of society as it

is in the social insects is a transformation and a dissolution in one

of the outlines which have been specially the symbols of man. In the

cloud and confusion of the flies and bees is growing fainter and

fainter, as is finally disappearing, the idea of the human family. The

hive has become larger than the house, the bees are destroying their

captors; what the locust hath left, the caterpillar hath eaten; and the

little house and garden of our friend Jones is in a bad way.

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When Lord Morley said that the House of Lords must be either mended or

ended, he used a phrase which has caused some confusion; because it

might seem to suggest that mending and ending are somewhat similar

things. I wish specially to insist on the fact that mending and ending

are opposite things. You mend a thing because you like it; you end a

thing because you don't. To mend is to strengthen. I, for instance,

disbelieve in oligarchy; so l would no more mend the House of Lords

than I would mend a thumbscrew. On the other hand, I do believe in the

family; therefore I would mend the family as I would mend a chair; and

I will never deny for a moment that the modern family is a chair that

wants mending. But here comes in the essential point about the mass of

modern advanced sociologists. Here are two institutions that have

always been fundamental with mankind, the family and the state.

Anarchists, I believe, disbelieve in both. It is quite unfair to say

that Socialists believe in the state, but do not believe in the family;

thousands of Socialists believe more in the family than any Tory. But

it is true to say that while anarchists would end both, Socialists are

specially engaged in mending (that is, strengthening and renewing) the

state; and they are not specially engaged in strengthening and renewing

the family. They are not doing anything to define the functions of

father, mother, and child, as such; they are not tightening the machine

up again; they are not blackening in again the fading lines of the old

drawing. With the state they are doing this; they are sharpening its

machinery, they are blackening in its black dogmatic lines, they are

making mere government in every way stronger and in some ways harsher

than before. While they leave the home in ruins, they restore the hive,

especially the stings. Indeed, some schemes of labor and Poor Law

reform recently advanced by distinguished Socialists, amount to little

more than putting the largest number of people in the despotic power of

Mr. Bumble. Apparently, progress means being moved on-- by the police.

The point it is my purpose to urge might perhaps be suggested thus:

that Socialists and most social reformers of their color are vividly

conscious of the line between the kind of things that belong to the

state and the kind of things that belong to mere chaos or uncoercible

nature; they may force children to go to school before the sun rises,

but they will not try to force the sun to rise; they will not, like

Canute, banish the sea, but only the sea-bathers. But inside the

outline of the state their lines are confused, and entities melt into

each other. They have no firm instinctive sense of one thing being in

its nature private and another public, of one thing being necessarily

bond and another free. That is why piece by piece, and quite silently,

personal liberty is being stolen from Englishmen, as personal land has

been silently stolen ever since the sixteenth century.

I can only put it sufficiently curtly in a careless simile. A Socialist

means a man who thinks a walking-stick like an umbrella because they

both go into the umbrella-stand. Yet they are as different as a

battle-ax and a bootjack. The essential idea of an umbrella is breadth

and protection. The essential idea of a stick is slenderness and,

partly, attack. The stick is the sword, the umbrella is the shield, but

it is a shield against another and more nameless enemy-- the hostile

but anonymous universe. More properly, therefore, the umbrella is the

roof; it is a kind of collapsible house. But the vital difference goes

far deeper than this; it branches off into two kingdoms of man's mind,

with a chasm between. For the point is this: that the umbrella is a

shield against an enemy so actual as to be a mere nuisance; whereas the

stick is a sword against enemies so entirely imaginary as to be a pure

pleasure. The stick is not merely a sword, but a court sword; it is a

thing of purely ceremonial swagger. One cannot express the emotion in

any way except by saying that a man feels more like a man with a stick

in his hand, just as he feels more like a man with a sword at his side.

But nobody ever had any swelling sentiments about an umbrella; it is a

convenience, like a door scraper. An umbrella is a necessary evil. A

walking-stick is a quite unnecessary good. This, I fancy, is the real

explanation of the perpetual losing of umbrellas; one does not hear of

people losing walking sticks. For a walking-stick is a pleasure, a

piece of real personal property; it is missed even when it is not

needed. When my right hand forgets its stick may it forget its cunning.

But anybody may forget an umbrella, as anybody might forget a shed that

he has stood up in out of the rain. Anybody can forget a necessary

thing.

If I might pursue the figure of speech, I might briefly say that the

whole Collectivist error consists in saying that because two men can

share an umbrella, therefore two men can share a walking-stick.

Umbrellas might possibly be replaced by some kind of common awnings

covering certain streets from particular showers. But there is nothing

but nonsense in the notion of swinging a communal stick; it is as if

one spoke of twirling a communal mustache. It will be said that this is

a frank fantasia and that no sociologists suggest such follies. Pardon

me if they do. I will give a precise parallel to the case of confusion

of sticks and umbrellas, a parallel from a perpetually reiterated

suggestion of reform. At least sixty Socialists out of a hundred, when

they have spoken of common laundries, will go on at once to speak of

common kitchens. This is just as mechanical and unintelligent as the

fanciful case I have quoted. Sticks and umbrellas are both stiff rods

that go into holes in a stand in the hall. Kitchens and washhouses are

both large rooms full of heat and damp and steam. But the soul and

function of the two things are utterly opposite. There is only one way

of washing a shirt; that is, there is only one right way. There is no

taste and fancy in tattered shirts. Nobody says, "Tompkins likes five

holes in his shirt, but I must say, give me the good old four holes."

Nobody says, "This washerwoman rips up the left leg of my pyjamas; now

if there is one thing I insist on it is the right leg ripped up." The

ideal washing is simply to send a thing back washed. But it is by no

means true that the ideal cooking is simply to send a thing back

cooked. Cooking is an art; it has in it personality, and even

perversity, for the definition of an art is that which must be personal

and may be perverse. I know a man, not otherwise dainty, who cannot

touch common sausages unless they are almost burned to a coal. He wants

his sausages fried to rags, yet he does not insist on his shirts being

boiled to rags. I do not say that such points of culinary delicacy are

of high importance. I do not say that the communal ideal must give way

to them. What I say is that the communal ideal is not conscious of

their existence, and therefore goes wrong from the very start, mixing a

wholly public thing with a highly individual one. Perhaps we ought to

accept communal kitchens in the social crisis, just as we should accept

communal cat's-meat in a siege. But the cultured Socialist, quite at

his ease, by no means in a siege, talks about communal kitchens as if

they were the same kind of thing as communal laundries. This shows at

the start that he misunderstands human nature. It is as different as

three men singing the same chorus from three men playing three tunes on

the same piano.

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In the quarrel earlier alluded to between the energetic Progressive and

the obstinate Conservative (or, to talk a tenderer language, between

Hudge and Gudge), the state of cross-purposes is at the present moment

acute. The Tory says he wants to preserve family life in Cindertown;

the Socialist very reasonably points out to him that in Cindertown at

present there isn't any family life to preserve. But Hudge, the

Socialist, in his turn, is highly vague and mysterious about whether he

would preserve the family life if there were any; or whether he will

try to restore it where it has disappeared. It is all very confusing.

The Tory sometimes talks as if he wanted to tighten the domestic bonds

that do not exist; the Socialist as if he wanted to loosen the bonds

that do not bind anybody. The question we all want to ask of both of

them is the original ideal question, "Do you want to keep the family at

all?" If Hudge, the Socialist, does want the family he must be prepared

for the natural restraints, distinctions and divisions of labor in the

family. He must brace himself up to bear the idea of the woman having a

preference for the private house and a man for the public house. He

must manage to endure somehow the idea of a woman being womanly, which

does not mean soft and yielding, but handy, thrifty, rather hard, and

very humorous. He must confront without a quiver the notion of a child

who shall be childish, that is, full of energy, but without an idea of

independence; fundamentally as eager for authority as for information

and butter-scotch. If a man, a woman and a child live together any more

in free and sovereign households, these ancient relations will recur;

and Hudge must put up with it. He can only avoid it by destroying the

family, driving both sexes into sexless hives and hordes, and bringing

up all children as the children of the state--like Oliver Twist. But if

these stern words must be addressed to Hudge, neither shall Gudge

escape a somewhat severe admonition. For the plain truth to be told

pretty sharply to the Tory is this, that if he wants the family to

remain, if he wants to be strong enough to resist the rending forces of

our essentially savage commerce, he must make some very big sacrifices

and try to equalize property. The overwhelming mass of the English

people at this particular instant are simply too poor to be domestic.

They are as domestic as they can manage; they are much more domestic

than the governing class; but they cannot get what good there was

originally meant to be in this institution, simply because they have

not got enough money. The man ought to stand for a certain magnanimity,

quite lawfully expressed in throwing money away: but if under given

circumstances he can only do it by throwing the week's food away, then

he is not magnanimous, but mean. The woman ought to stand for a certain

wisdom which is well expressed in valuing things rightly and guarding

money sensibly; but how is she to guard money if there is no money to

guard? The child ought to look on his mother as a fountain of natural

fun and poetry; but how can he unless the fountain, like other

fountains, is allowed to play? What chance have any of these ancient

arts and functions in a house so hideously topsy-turvy; a house where

the woman is out working and the man isn't; and the child is forced by

law to think his schoolmaster's requirements more important than his

mother's? No, Gudge and his friends in the House of Lords and the

Carlton Club must make up their minds on this matter, and that very

quickly. If they are content to have England turned into a beehive and

an ant-hill, decorated here and there with a few faded butterflies

playing at an old game called domesticity in the intervals of the

divorce court, then let them have their empire of insects; they will

find plenty of Socialists who will give it to them. But if they want a

domestic England, they must "shell out," as the phrase goes, to a

vastly greater extent than any Radical politician has yet dared to

suggest; they must endure burdens much heavier than the Budget and

strokes much deadlier than the death duties; for the thing to be done

is nothing more nor less than the distribution of the great fortunes

and the great estates. We can now only avoid Socialism by a change as

vast as Socialism. If we are to save property, we must distribute

property, almost as sternly and sweepingly as did the French

Revolution. If we are to preserve the family we must revolutionize the

nation.

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And now, as this book is drawing to a close, I will whisper in the

reader's ear a horrible suspicion that has sometimes haunted me: the

suspicion that Hudge and Gudge are secretly in partnership. That the

quarrel they keep up in public is very much of a put-up job, and that

the way in which they perpetually play into each other's hands is not

an everlasting coincidence. Gudge, the plutocrat, wants an anarchic

industrialism; Hudge, the idealist, provides him with lyric praises of

anarchy. Gudge wants women-workers because they are cheaper; Hudge

calls the woman's work "freedom to live her own life." Gudge wants

steady and obedient workmen, Hudge preaches teetotalism-- to workmen,

not to Gudge--Gudge wants a tame and timid population who will never

take arms against tyranny; Hudge proves from Tolstoi that nobody must

take arms against anything. Gudge is naturally a healthy and

well-washed gentleman; Hudge earnestly preaches the perfection of

Gudge's washing to people who can't practice it. Above all, Gudge rules

by a coarse and cruel system of sacking and sweating and bi-sexual toil

which is totally inconsistent with the free family and which is bound

to destroy it; therefore Hudge, stretching out his arms to the universe

with a prophetic smile, tells us that the family is something that we

shall soon gloriously outgrow.

I do not know whether the partnership of Hudge and Gudge is conscious

or unconscious. I only know that between them they still keep the

common man homeless. I only know I still meet Jones walking the streets

in the gray twilight, looking sadly at the poles and barriers and low

red goblin lanterns which still guard the house which is none the less

his because he has never been in it.

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Here, it may be said, my book ends just where it ought to begin. I have

said that the strong centers of modern English property must swiftly or

slowly be broken up, if even the idea of property is to remain among

Englishmen. There are two ways in which it could be done, a cold

administration by quite detached officials, which is called

Collectivism, or a personal distribution, so as to produce what is

called Peasant Proprietorship. I think the latter solution the finer

and more fully human, because it makes each man as somebody blamed

somebody for saying of the Pope, a sort of small god. A man on his own

turf tastes eternity or, in other words, will give ten minutes more

work than is required. But I believe I am justified in shutting the

door on this vista of argument, instead of opening it. For this book is

not designed to prove the case for Peasant Proprietorship, but to prove

the case against modern sages who turn reform to a routine. The whole

of this book has been a rambling and elaborate urging of one purely

ethical fact. And if by any chance it should happen that there are

still some who do not quite see what that point is, I will end with one

plain parable, which is none the worse for being also a fact.

A little while ago certain doctors and other persons permitted by

modern law to dictate to their shabbier fellow-citizens, sent out an

order that all little girls should have their hair cut short. I mean,

of course, all little girls whose parents were poor. Many very

unhealthy habits are common among rich little girls, but it will be

long before any doctors interfere forcibly with them. Now, the case for

this particular interference was this, that the poor are pressed down

from above into such stinking and suffocating underworlds of squalor,

that poor people must not be allowed to have hair, because in their

case it must mean lice in the hair. Therefore, the doctors propose to

abolish the hair. It never seems to have occurred to them to abolish

the lice. Yet it could be done. As is common in most modern discussions

the unmentionable thing is the pivot of the whole discussion. It is

obvious to any Christian man (that is, to any man with a free soul)

that any coercion applied to a cabman's daughter ought, if possible, to

be applied to a Cabinet Minister's daughter. I will not ask why the

doctors do not, as a matter of fact apply their rule to a Cabinet

Minister's daughter. I will not ask, because I know. They do not

because they dare not. But what is the excuse they would urge, what is

the plausible argument they would use, for thus cutting and clipping

poor children and not rich? Their argument would be that the disease is

more likely to be in the hair of poor people than of rich. And why?

Because the poor children are forced (against all the instincts of the

highly domestic working classes) to crowd together in close rooms under

a wildly inefficient system of public instruction; and because in one

out of the forty children there may be offense. And why? Because the

poor man is so ground down by the great rents of the great ground

landlords that his wife often has to work as well as he. Therefore she

has no time to look after the children, therefore one in forty of them

is dirty. Because the workingman has these two persons on top of him,

the landlord sitting (literally) on his stomach, and the schoolmaster

sitting (literally) on his head, the workingman must allow his little

girl's hair, first to be neglected from poverty, next to be poisoned by

promiscuity, and, lastly, to be abolished by hygiene. He, perhaps, was

proud of his little girl's hair. But he does not count.

Upon this simple principle (or rather precedent) the sociological

doctor drives gayly ahead. When a crapulous tyranny crushes men down

into the dirt, so that their very hair is dirty, the scientific course

is clear. It would be long and laborious to cut off the heads of the

tyrants; it is easier to cut off the hair of the slaves. In the same

way, if it should ever happen that poor children, screaming with

toothache, disturbed any schoolmaster or artistic gentleman, it would

be easy to pull out all the teeth of the poor; if their nails were

disgustingly dirty, their nails could be plucked out; if their noses

were indecently blown, their noses could be cut off. The appearance of

our humbler fellow-citizen could be quite strikingly simplified before

we had done with him. But all this is not a bit wilder than the brute

fact that a doctor can walk into the house of a free man, whose

daughter's hair may be as clean as spring flowers, and order him to cut

it off. It never seems to strike these people that the lesson of lice

in the slums is the wrongness of slums, not the wrongness of hair. Hair

is, to say the least of it, a rooted thing. Its enemy (like the other

insects and oriental armies of whom we have spoken) sweep upon us but

seldom. In truth, it is only by eternal institutions like hair that we

can test passing institutions like empires. If a house is so built as

to knock a man's head off when he enters it, it is built wrong.

The mob can never rebel unless it is conservative, at least enough to

have conserved some reasons for rebelling. It is the most awful thought

in all our anarchy, that most of the ancient blows struck for freedom

would not be struck at all to-day, because of the obscuration of the

clean, popular customs from which they came. The insult that brought

down the hammer of Wat Tyler might now be called a medical examination.

That which Virginius loathed and avenged as foul slavery might now be

praised as free love. The cruel taunt of Foulon, "Let them eat grass,"

might now be represented as the dying cry of an idealistic vegetarian.

Those great scissors of science that would snip off the curls of the

poor little school children are ceaselessly snapping closer and closer

to cut off all the corners and fringes of the arts and honors of the

poor. Soon they will be twisting necks to suit clean collars, and

hacking feet to fit new boots. It never seems to strike them that the

body is more than raiment; that the Sabbath was made for man; that all

institutions shall be judged and damned by whether they have fitted the

normal flesh and spirit. It is the test of political sanity to keep

your head. It is the test of artistic sanity to keep your hair on.

Now the whole parable and purpose of these last pages, and indeed of

all these pages, is this: to assert that we must instantly begin all

over again, and begin at the other end. I begin with a little girl's

hair. That I know is a good thing at any rate. Whatever else is evil,

the pride of a good mother in the beauty of her daughter is good. It is

one of those adamantine tendernesses which are the touchstones of every

age and race. If other things are against it, other things must go

down. If landlords and laws and sciences are against it, landlords and

laws and sciences must go down. With the red hair of one she-urchin in

the gutter I will set fire to all modern civilization. Because a girl

should have long hair, she should have clean hair; because she should

have clean hair, she should not have an unclean home: because she

should not have an unclean home, she should have a free and leisured

mother; because she should have a free mother, she should not have an

usurious landlord; because there should not be an usurious landlord,

there should be a redistribution of property; because there should be a

redistribution of property, there shall be a revolution. That little

urchin with the gold-red hair, whom I have just watched toddling past

my house, she shall not be lopped and lamed and altered; her hair shall

not be cut short like a convict's; no, all the kingdoms of the earth

shall be hacked about and mutilated to suit her. She is the human and

sacred image; all around her the social fabric shall sway and split and

fall; the pillars of society shall be shaken, and the roofs of ages

come rushing down, and not one hair of her head shall be harmed.

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Not wishing to overload this long essay with too many parentheses,

apart from its thesis of progress and precedent, I append here three

notes on points of detail that may possibly be misunderstood.

The first refers to the female controversy. It may seem to many that I

dismiss too curtly the contention that all women should have votes,

even if most women do not desire them. It is constantly said in this

connection that males have received the vote (the agricultural laborers

for instance) when only a minority of them were in favor of it. Mr.

Galsworthy, one of the few fine fighting intellects of our time, has

talked this language in the "Nation." Now, broadly, I have only to

answer here, as everywhere in this book, that history is not a toboggan

slide, but a road to be reconsidered and even retraced. If we really

forced General Elections upon free laborers who definitely disliked

General Elections, then it was a thoroughly undemocratic thing to do;

if we are democrats we ought to undo it. We want the will of the

people, not the votes of the people; and to give a man a vote against

his will is to make voting more valuable than the democracy it

declares.

But this analogy is false, for a plain and particular reason. Many

voteless women regard a vote as unwomanly. Nobody says that most

voteless men regarded a vote as unmanly. Nobody says that any voteless

men regarded it as unmanly. Not in the stillest hamlet or the most

stagnant fen could you find a yokel or a tramp who thought he lost his

sexual dignity by being part of a political mob. If he did not care

about a vote it was solely because he did not know about a vote; he did

not understand the word any better than Bimetallism. His opposition, if

it existed, was merely negative. His indifference to a vote was really

indifference.

But the female sentiment against the franchise, whatever its size, is

positive. It is not negative; it is by no means indifferent. Such women

as are opposed to the change regard it (rightly or wrongly) as

unfeminine. That is, as insulting certain affirmative traditions to

which they are attached. You may think such a view prejudiced; but I

violently deny that any democrat has a right to override such

prejudices, if they are popular and positive. Thus he would not have a

right to make millions of Moslems vote with a cross if they had a

prejudice in favor of voting with a crescent. Unless this is admitted,

democracy is a farce we need scarcely keep up. If it is admitted, the

Suffragists have not merely to awaken an indifferent, but to convert a

hostile majority.

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On re-reading my protest, which I honestly think much needed, against

our heathen idolatry of mere ablution, I see that it may possibly be

misread. I hasten to say that I think washing a most important thing to

be taught both to rich and poor. I do not attack the positive but the

relative position of soap. Let it be insisted on even as much as now;

but let other things be insisted on much more. I am even ready to admit

that cleanliness is next to godliness; but the moderns will not even

admit godliness to be next to cleanliness. In their talk about Thomas

Becket and such saints and heroes they make soap more important than

soul; they reject godliness whenever it is not cleanliness. If we

resent this about remote saints and heroes, we should resent it more

about the many saints and heroes of the slums, whose unclean hands

cleanse the world. Dirt is evil chiefly as evidence of sloth; but the

fact remains that the classes that wash most are those that work least.

Concerning these, the practical course is simple; soap should be urged

on them and advertised as what it is--a luxury. With regard to the poor

also the practical course is not hard to harmonize with our thesis. If

we want to give poor people soap we must set out deliberately to give

them luxuries. If we will not make them rich enough to be clean, then

emphatically we must do what we did with the saints. We must reverence

them for being dirty.

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I have not dealt with any details touching distributed ownership, or

its possibility in England, for the reason stated in the text. This

book deals with what is wrong, wrong in our root of argument and

effort. This wrong is, I say, that we will go forward because we dare

not go back. Thus the Socialist says that property is already

concentrated into Trusts and Stores: the only hope is to concentrate it

further in the State. I say the only hope is to unconcentrate it; that

is, to repent and return; the only step forward is the step backward.

But in connection with this distribution I have laid myself open to

another potential mistake. In speaking of a sweeping redistribution, I

speak of decision in the aim, not necessarily of abruptness in the

means. It is not at all too late to restore an approximately rational

state of English possessions without any mere confiscation. A policy of

buying out landlordism, steadily adopted in England as it has already

been adopted in Ireland (notably in Mr. Wyndham's wise and fruitful

Act), would in a very short time release the lower end of the see-saw

and make the whole plank swing more level. The objection to this course

is not at all that it would not do, only that it will not be done. If

we leave things as they are, there will almost certainly be a crash of

confiscation. If we hesitate, we shall soon have to hurry. But if we

start doing it quickly we have still time to do it slowly.

This point, however, is not essential to my book. All I have to urge

between these two boards is that I dislike the big Whiteley shop, and

that I dislike Socialism because it will (according to Socialists) be

so like that shop. It is its fulfilment, not its reversal. I do not

object to Socialism because it will revolutionize our commerce, but

because it will leave it so horribly the same.

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