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THE CHESTER-BELLOC MONSTER

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“Laeti bibamus sobriam ebrietatem Spiritus Sancti.”



WE ARE PLEASED TO OFFER TO OUR READERS THIS SPECIAL EDITION OF *FAITH AND Reason* in honor of the 50th anniversary of the death of Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936). We have seen fit to unite to this commemoration of G. K. Chesterton his intimate friend and fellow confessor of faith, Hilaire Belloc.

It is most fitting that we should unite these two Christian warriors who each in their own way fought for the Faith against its enemies, thereby defending all that was good and noble in the human spirit. This deep bond of friendship between these two men of powerful intellect and magnanimous heart was manifested in Chesterton's Autobiography in which he dedicated an entire chapter entitled “Portrait of a Friend” to Belloc; and also in Belloc's *On the Place of Gilbert Chesterton in English Letters* where he makes reference to “a permanent and active personal friendship, through which we were very close companions for more than 30 years.” This friendship which was grounded in both natural attraction and a mutual grasp of the paradoxical, supernatural truths of the Faith was well known and lamented in some quarters. George Bernard Shaw, who loved Chesterton for his merry wit, delightful personality and natural affability, deplored the close relationship and the “excessive” influence which Belloc had on Chesterton.

The two men met while contributing to the weekly paper “The Speaker” and could frequently be seen together along with Chesterton's older brother, Cecil, meeting and drinking in various Fleet Street Pubs. These meetings in the pubs provided a striking example of authentic Catholic pluralism within the bibulous household of the Faith: Belloc would always drink wine while the Chestertons preferred beer and what the Irish refer to as *aqua vitae* -namely whiskey.

We must, before we go further, offer a belated word of thanks to Mr. Shaw for giving to us the inspired title for the issue “The Chester-Belloc Monster”. This is how these men shall appear to those men filled with spiritus mundi who hate the Roman Catholic Church and the universal truth which she boldly proclaims to all men. Chesterton and Belloc were pre-eminently apologists in the full sense of the word. They were defenders of the Faith. These two men loved the Church and the civilization she had built. Holy Mother Church found in these two men champions who were willing to fight in the intellectual tradition of Christian knighthood for her honor and that of her great King.

I recall my first reading of *Orthodoxy* as an undergraduate at Loyola University. It was then and still is a dazzling work which opens wide vistas, revealing magnificent, sweeping landscapes of life, truth and beauty. Beats there a heart so stony that it can not be stirred by the excitement and grandeur of orthodoxy as communicated by Chesterton? Who can forget his magnificent vision of that heavenly chariot which “flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect.” This is writing which strikes the imagination, fires the blood and quickens the reason.

My first introduction to Belloc occurred when I came upon a small Catholic bookstore in London where I purchased a copy of *Europe and the Faith*. In this outstanding work, so filled with profound historical and theological insight, Belloc lucidly sets forth the Catholic vision of history as Chesterton would later do with his masterpiece *The Everlasting Man*. For Belloc, the Catholic understands the history of Europe from within. He does not have to struggle as the secularist who gropes for the shadow of things outside that household of the Faith, which is the Church.

The Catholic brings to history (when I say “history” in these pages I mean the history of Christendom) self-knowledge. As a man in the confessional accuses himself of what he knows to be true and what other people cannot judge, so a Catholic, talking of the United European civilization, when he blames it, blames it for motives and for acts which are his own. He himself could have done those things in person. He is not relatively right in his blame, he is absolutely right. As a man can testify to his own motive, so can the Catholic testify to his own motive, so can the Catholic testify to unjust, irrelevant, or ignorant conceptions of the European story; for he knows why and how it proceeded. Others, not Catholic, look upon the story of Europe externally, as strangers. They have to deal with something which presents itself to them partially and disconnectedly, by its phenomena alone: he sees it all from its center, in its essence, and together.

I say again, renewing the terms, the Church is Europe: and Europe is the Church.

How deeply tragic that these two men who passionately tended the sacred vestal fires of the Catholic household are unknown to so many who dwell within the *sancti muri domus Dei*.

Belloc, upon whom Providence bestowed the office of prophet, with all the tortured isolation which has been its mark from Cassandra to Jeremiah, said that Chesterton’s future fame would be dependent upon the future of England:

The result depends not upon him but upon his country. It may be that his country is in decline and will be unable to learn the great lesson. It may be that this country (which he so deeply loved and so exactly represented) will rise to things even greater than those of its great past. If it does so,

Gilbert Chesterton’s name will be among the first English names. If it does not, he will be forgotten.

This concern for the path England would choose had been set down earlier in verse by Cardinal Newman:

Tyre of the West, and glorying in the name
More than in Faith’s pure name!
O trust not crafty fort nor rock renowned
Earned upon hostile ground;
Wielding Trade’s master-keys, at thy proud will To lock
or loose its waters, England: trust not still.

Dread thine own posers! Since haughty Babel’s prime,
High towers have been man’s crime. Since her hoar age,
when the huge moat lay bare, Strongholds have been
man’s snare. Thy nest is in the crags; ah! refuge
frail! Mad counsel in its hour, or traitors will prevail.

He who scanned Sodom for His righteous men
Still spares thee for thy ten;
But, should vain tongues the Bride of Heaven defy, He
will not pass thee by; For, as earth’s kings welcome
their spotless guest, So gives He them by turn, to suffer
or be blest.

As for the memory of Belloc, Monsignor Ronald Knox, in *The Panegyric* said, “What he cared for was not the good word of posterity taken in the gross, but the praise of Christendom.” Such was the goodness, simplicity and humility of Hilaire Belloc.

In this special commemorative issue we have a number of fine contributions. Getting underway is an essay by Mr. Robert Hickson. In what was clearly a labor of love, he probes how these two men grasped the paradoxical nature of Faith, particularly in the inner structure of the Catholic dogmas of creation and the Incarnation. He shows how these two rooted men found in the Faith the deepest source of the bonds of their friendship.

Fr. Stanley Jaki, in his second article for the journal, stresses the depth of Chesterton’s Catholic identity which many seek to downplay today or dismiss as inconsequential. He also speaks to those who snidely remark that Chesterton “never wrote so well after his conversation.”

One of the falsehoods that has kept many away from reading Belloc has been the charge of anti-Semi-

tism. Dr. Kevin Long deals with this slanderous accusation in a forthright and balanced essay which explores Belloc's attitude towards the children of Abraham as found in his book *The Jews*.

When considering who could best write an article on Chesterton's brilliant work *Orthodoxy*, I immediately thought of Fritz Wilhelmsen. When I spoke to him concerning the issue and my hopes for his contribution, he was elated. He exclaimed, "That's my favorite book!" He wrote his essay while teaching in the Eternal City. What better setting could there be for writing about the "romance of orthodoxy?"

Next we have a presentation of Belloc as a Christian warrior. This reflective essay by Miss Eleanor Cummings, a graduate of Christendom, was originally a thesis written in the English Department under the capable direction of the chairman, Robert Hickson. We believe it to be an excellent and timely work and we are pleased to offer it here.

Lastly, we have a contribution from Dr. Warren Carroll, who has contributed so much in his life and writings to the Catholic vision of history. Naturally, when speaking of Chesterton as an historian, one immediately thinks of what is arguably his finest work, *The Everlasting Man*. This massive, historical apologetic, which so impressed Evelyn Waugh, is powerfully presented by Dr. Carroll.

We offer to you, dear lector, these essays with the firmest conviction that these Catholic warriors who labored in the day's heat and knew the stings and wounds of battle must not be forgotten. We must not allow their vision of joyful festivity and spiritual childhood to be forgotten.

It is a most precious and sacred patrimony which must be handed down. It is traditio celebrationis! It is God, wine, reality and the Te Deums of Christendom after Lepanto. That patrimony is nothing other than the Res Catholica.

One thing in this world is different from all other. It has a personality and a force. It is recognized, and (when recognized) most violently loved or hated. It is the Catholic Church. Within that household the human spirit has roof and hearth. Outside it, is the Night.

"In hac urbe lux sollennis Ver
aeternum, pax perennis et
aeterna gaudia."

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