

nishness be destroyed as was Prussian. If all others desert Ireland, if all the blatant spouters who told us that we were fighting for right and justice make common cause for the purpose of upholding the persecutors of a Catholic people, America will not fail. America will remember her debt to Ireland. America will repay when the day comes. The intervention of Mr. Wilson or the recognition on the part of England of the justice of Irish claims may yet end the struggle without bloodshed. Failing the one and the other, there is little room to doubt that the nations that fought to make the world safe for Democracy will witness the spectacle of a brutal power once more trying to trample down a free people, even as the hordes of Germany trampled on Belgium. And even if that comes to pass, Ireland will win in the end as she has always won after England did her worst. And England will lose as she has always lost after she bludgeoned a weak nation—she will lose Ireland, and as well will lose the remnants of respect that the nations have for her.

MOULDERS OF PUBLIC OPINION : MR. G. K. CHESTERTON

(By E. T. Raymond, in *Everyman*.)

Mr. Chesterton, as a jesting philosopher, suffers one considerable disadvantage. Serious people tend to like his jokes and distrust his philosophy. Flippant people are willing to respect his philosophy at a distance, but refuse to be amused by his pleasantries.

There is a highly intellectual set of men their view is expressed by Mr. A. G. Gardiner—who will not have Mr. Chesterton as a thinker, but roar their sides out when he says "Pass the mustard." They insist on treating him simply as an embodied, even over-embodied, jest, as "your only jig-maker," a "Thousand Best Things," bound, like the books of Meudon, in human skin. On the other hand, the professional merry-makers find little amusement in Mr. Chesterton. Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Cadbury parted. Mr. Chesterton and Sir Owen Seaman have apparently never met. The greatest joke of the age is never seen in *Punch*.

It is, I suppose, Mr. Chesterton's own fault that he is so generally conceived as a chuckle, *et praterrea parum*. He has made himself, or allowed himself to become, too much of a character. There was a time when he sat on a high-legged stool, in a city office, doing something with invoices. It is true he did not stay there long, but his mere presence for the fraction of a day would seem proof that at one time he was thought commercially possible, capable of being made some sort of a clerk. That is to say, he must have presented

some outward resemblance to other youths; from Aldgate Pump to St. Paul's Churchyard no firm exists wide-minded enough to admit a recruit with the vast sombrero, the Samsonian locks, and the Bolivar-poncho cloak which at a later period were the honest pride of Fleet Street, still reveling, though grown prim itself, in the reputation of Bohemianism. Whether Mr. Chesterton, of fixed purpose, adopted the dress and mannerisms of his earlier period, or whether it was all more or less an accident, only Mr. Chesterton may say. But in permitting himself to become a character he threw away much of his birthright as an influence.

The fault is, of course, the time's as well as Mr. Chesterton's. Socrates was joked at as much as Mr. Chesterton, but Socrates was no joke. Many a saint must have raised a coarse laugh by his appearance, but no saint was ever a laughing matter. Yet we moderns, with our mania for specialism, will hardly allow Jack Point to have a soul to save or a tooth to ache. If accepted as an authentic funny man, he must be funny for ever. The mere fact about Mr. Chesterton is that he is a big man, who dresses as he likes, and, being inactive and fond of his comfort, used to take many cabs when cabs could be taken. He also drank a certain moderate quantity of beer when it was, at least, an intelligible proceeding to drink beer. Further, he preferred an excellent meal in a tavern, with good company, to decorous malnutrition at two shillings a mouthful.

It was inevitable that a legend should grow round such a man: unfortunately the legend, for most people, has strangled the man, as ivy does a tree. I have before me what purports to be a critical study of Mr. Chesterton. If I knew nothing else of the subject I should picture a person physically and mentally inert, conceited, rather puerile, and given to paltry verbal smartness—a Cockney Tony Lumpkin who, like Olivia Primrose, had "read a great deal of controversy." It may be Mr. Chesterton's fault that he is so represented. It is certainly society's misfortune that it has no clearer estimate of one of the most powerful personalities of the time.

Clearly the only way to arrive at the truth is to put in as evidence Mr. Chesterton's own books. Swinburne has protested against the theory that an unlettered Shakespeare wrote "Hamlet" without effort in odd times—"as a bird might moult a feather or a fool might break a jest": he knew that such things were not made so. And the works of Gilbert Keith Chesterton contain ample testimony on which to found an impeachment of a quite novel kind. He stands hereby indicted for that he has labored well and faithfully, first to see the truth and then to tell it; for that he, being a great rhetorician, seldom uses rhetoric to obscure or to deceive; and, being a great wit, employs wit only to season wisdom and make it memorable.



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