

THE GOD WITH THE GOLDEN KEY

Some time ago, seated at ease upon a summer evening and taking a serene review of an indefensibly fortunate and happy life, I calculated that I must have committed at least fifty-three murders, and been concerned with hiding about half a hundred corpses for the purpose of the concealment of crimes; hanging one corpse on a hat-peg, bundling another into a postman's bag, decapitating a third and providing it with somebody else's head, and so on through quite a large number of innocent artifices of the kind. It is true that I have enacted most of these atrocities on paper; and I strongly recommend the young student, except in extreme cases, to give expression to his criminal impulses in this form; and not run the risk of spoiling a beautiful and well-proportioned idea by bringing it down to the plane of brute material experiment, where it too often suffers the unforeseen imperfections and disappointments of this fallen world, and brings with it various unwelcome and unworthy social and legal consequences. I have explained elsewhere that I once drew up a scientific table of Twenty Ways of Killing a Wife and have managed to preserve them all in their undisturbed artistic completeness, so that it is possible for the artist, after a fashion, to have successfully murdered twenty wives and yet keep the original wife after all; an additional point which is in many cases, and especially my own, not without its advantages. Whereas, for the artist to sacrifice his wife and possibly his neck, for the mere vulgar and theatrical practical presentation of one of these ideal dramas, is to lose, not only this, but all the ideal enjoyment of the other nineteen. This being my strict principle, from which I have never wavered, there has been nothing to cut short the rich accumulation of imaginative corpses; and, as I say, I have already accumulated a good many. My name achieved a certain notoriety as that of a writer of these murderous short stories, commonly called detective stories; certain publishers and magazines have come to count on me for such trifles; and are still kind enough, from time to time, to write to me ordering a new batch of corpses; generally in consignments of eight at a time.



Any who have come upon traces of this industry may possibly know that a large number of my little crime stories were concerned with a person called Father Brown; a Catholic priest whose external simplicity and internal subtlety formed something near enough to a character for the purposes of this sketchy sort of story-telling. And certain questions have arisen, especially questions about the identity or accuracy of the type, which have not been without an effect on more important things.

As I have said, I have never taken my novels or short stories very seriously, or imagined that I had any particular status in anything so serious as a novel. But I can claim at the same time that it was novel enough to be novel, in the sense of not being historical or biographical; and that even one of my short stories was original enough to do without originals. The notion that a character in a novel must be "meant" for somebody or "taken from" somebody is founded on a misunderstanding of the nature of narrative fancy, and especially of such slight fancies as mine. Nevertheless, it has been generally said that Father Brown had an original in real life; and in one particular and rather personal sense, it is true.

The notion that a novelist takes a character bodily and in all its details from a friend or an enemy is a blunder that has done a great deal of harm. Even the characters of Dickens, at once so plainly creations and so plainly caricatures, were measured against mere mortals, as if there were any mortals who could fit exactly the magnificent mock-heroic stature of Weller or Micawber. I remember my father telling me how some of his contemporaries indignantly purged themselves of the charge of being the model of Mr. Pecksniff; and especially of how the well-known S. C. Hall, the Spiritualist, cleared himself with an eloquence which some found too sublime to be convincing. "How can I be said to resemble Pecksniff?" said this worthy man to my father. "You know me. The world knows me. The world knows that I have devoted my life to the good of others, that I have lived a pure and exalted life devoted to the highest duties and ideals, that I have sought always to set an example of truth, of justice,



of probity, or purity and or public virtue. What resemblance can there be between me and Pecksniff?"

When a writer invents a character for the purposes of fiction, especially of light or fanciful fiction, he fits him out with all sorts of features meant to be effective in that setting and against that background. He may have taken, and probably has taken, a hint from a human being. But he will not hesitate to alter the human being, especially in externals, because he is not thinking of a portrait but of a picture. In Father Brown, it was the chief feature to be featureless. The point of him was to appear pointless; and one might say that his conspicuous quality was not being conspicuous. His commonplace exterior was meant to contrast with his unsuspected vigilance and intelligence; and that being so, of course I made his appearance shabby and shapeless, his face round and expressionless, his manners clumsy, and so on. At the same time, I did take some of his inner intellectual qualities from my friend, Father John O'Connor of Bradford, who has not, as a matter of fact, any of these external qualities. He is not shabby, but rather neat; he is not clumsy, but very delicate and dexterous; he not only is but looks amusing and amused. He is a sensitive and quickwitted Irishman, with the profound irony and some of the potential irritability of his race. My Father Brown was deliberately described as a Suffolk dumpling from East Anglia. That, and the rest of his description, was a deliberate disguise for the purpose of detective fiction. But for all that, there is a very real sense in which Father O'Connor was the intellectual inspiration of these stories; and of much more important things as well. And in order to explain these things, especially the important things, I cannot do better than tell the story of how the first notion of this detective comedy came into my mind.

In those early days, especially just before and just after I was married, it was my fate to wander over many parts of England, delivering what were politely called lectures. There is a considerable appetite for such bleak entertainments, especially in the north of England, the south of Scotland and among certain active Nonconformist centres even in the suburbs of London. With the

mention of bleakness there comes back to me the memory of one particular chapel, lying in the last featureless wastes to the north of London, to which I actually had to make my way through a blinding snow-storm, which I enjoyed very much; because I like snowstorms. In fact, I like practically all kinds of English weather except that particular sort of weather that is called "a glorious day." So none need weep prematurely over my experience, or imagine that I am pitying myself or asking for pity. Still, it is the fact that I was exposed to the elements for nearly two hours either on foot or on top of a forlorn omnibus wandering in a wilderness; and by the time I arrived at the chapel I must have roughly resembled the Snow Man that children make in the garden. I proceeded to lecture, God knows on what, and was about to resume my wintry journey, when the worthy minister of the chapel, robustly rubbing his hands and slapping his chest and beaming at me with the rich hospitality of Father Christmas, said in a deep, hearty, fruity voice, "Come, Mr. Chesterton; it's a bitter cold night! Do let me offer you an oswego biscuit." I assured him gratefully that I felt no such craving; it was very kind of him, for there was no possible reason, in the circumstances for his offering me any refreshment at all. But I confess that the thought of returning through the snow and the freezing blast, for two more hours, with the glow of that one biscuit within me, and the oswego fire running through all my veins, struck me as a little out of proportion. I fear it was with considerable pleasure that I crossed the road and entered a public-house immediately opposite the chapel, under the very eyes of the Nonconformist Conscience.

This is a parenthesis; and I could add a good many parentheses about distant days of vagabond lecturing. Of those days the tale is told that I once sent a telegram to my wife in London, which ran, "Am in Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?" I cannot remember whether this story is true; but it is not unlikely or, I think, unreasonable. It was in the course of such wanderings that I made many friends whose friendship I value; such as Mr. Lloyd Thomas, then in Nottingham, and Mr. McClelland of Glasgow. But I mention these here only as leading up to that very accidental meeting

in Yorkshire, which was to have consequences for me rather beyond the appearance of accident. I had gone to give a lecture at Keighley on the high moors of the West Riding, and stayed the night with a leading citizen of that little industrial town; who had assembled a group of local friends such as could be conceived, I suppose, as likely to be patient with lecturers; including the curate of the Roman Catholic Church; a small man with a smooth face and a demure but elfish expression. I was struck by the tact and humour with which he mingled with his very Yorkshire and very Protestant company; and I soon found out that they had, in their bluff way, already learned to appreciate him as something of a character. Somebody gave me a very amusing account of how two gigantic Yorkshire farmers, of that district, had been deputed to go the rounds of various religious centres, and how they wavered, with nameless terrors, before entering the little presbytery of the little priest. With many sinkings of heart, they seem to have come finally to the conclusion that he would hardly do them any serious harm; and that if he did they could send for the police. They really thought, I suppose, that he had his house fitted up with all the torture engines of the Spanish Inquisition. But even these farmers, I was told, had since accepted him as a neighbour, and as the evening wore on his neighbours decidedly encouraged his considerable powers of entertainment. He expanded, and was soon in the middle of reciting that great heart-searching dramatic lyric which is entitled, "My Boots are Tight." I liked him very much; but if you had told me that ten years afterwards I should be a Mormon Missionary in the Cannibal Islands, I should not have been more surprised than at the suggestion that, fully fifteen years afterwards, I should be making to him my General Confession and being received into the Church that he served.

Next morning he and I walked over Keighley Gate, the great wall of the moors that separates Keighley from Wharfedale, for I was visiting friends in Ilkley; and after a few hours talk on the moors, it was a new friend whom I introduced to my old friends at my journey's end. He stayed to lunch; he stayed to tea; he stayed to dinner; I am not sure that, under their pressing hospitality, he did not

stay the night; and he stayed there many nights and days on later occasions; and it was there that we most often met. It was on one of these visits that the incident occurred, which led me to take the liberty of putting him, or rather part of him, into a string of sensational stories. But I mention it, not because I attach any importance to those stories, but because it has a more vital connection with the other story; the story that I am telling here.

I mentioned to the priest in conversation that I proposed to support in print a certain proposal, it matters not what, in connection with some rather sordid social questions of vice and crime. On this particular point he thought I was in error, or rather in ignorance; as indeed I was. And, merely as a necessary duty and to prevent me from falling into a mare's nest, he told me certain facts he knew about perverted practices which I certainly shall not set down or discuss here. I have confessed on an earlier page that in my own youth I had imagined for myself any amount of iniquity; and it was a curious experience to find that this quiet and pleasant celibate had plumbed those abysses far deeper than I. I had not imagined that the world could hold such horrors. If he had been a professional novelist throwing such filth broadcast on all the bookstalls for boys and babies to pick up, of course he would have been a great creative artist and a herald of the Dawn. As he was only stating them reluctantly, in strict privacy, as a practical necessity, he was, of course, a typical Jesuit whispering poisonous secrets in my ear. When we returned to the house, we found it was full of visitors, and fell into special conversation with two hearty and healthy young Cambridge undergraduates, who had been walking or cycling across the moors in the spirit of the stern and vigorous English holiday. They were no narrow athletes, however, but interested in various sports and in a breezy way in various arts; and they began to discuss music and landscape with my friend Father O'Connor. I never knew a man who could turn with more ease than he from one topic to another, or who had more unexpected stores of information, often purely technical information, upon all. The talk soon deepened into a discussion on matters more philosophical and moral; and when the priest had left

the room, the two young men broke out into generous expressions of admiration, saying truly that he was a remarkable man, and seemed to know a great deal about Palestrina or Baroque architecture, or whatever was the point at the moment. Then there fell a curious reflective silence, at the end of which one of the undergraduates suddenly burst out. "All the same, I don't believe his sort of life is the right one. It's all very well to like religious music and so on, when you're all shut up in a sort of cloister and don't know anything about the real evil in the world. But I don't believe that's the right ideal. I believe in a fellow coming out into the world, and facing the evil that's in it, and knowing something about the dangers and all that. It's a very beautiful thing to be innocent and ignorant; but I think it's a much finer thing not to be afraid of knowledge."

To me, still almost shivering with the appallingly practical facts of which the priest had warned me, this comment came with such a colossal and crushing irony, that I nearly burst into a loud harsh laugh in the drawing-room. For I knew perfectly well that, as regards all the solid Satanism which the priest knew and warred against with all his life, these two Cambridge gentlemen (luckily for them) knew about as much of real evil as two babies in the same perambulator.

And there sprang up in my mind the vague idea of making some artistic use of these comic yet tragic cross-purposes; and constructing a comedy in which a priest should appear to know nothing and in fact know more about crime than the criminals. I afterwards summed up the special idea in the story called "The Blue Cross", otherwise very slight and improbable, and continued it through the interminable series of tales with which I have afflicted the world. In short, I permitted myself the grave liberty of taking my friend and knocking him about; beating his hat and umbrella shapeless, untidying his clothes, punching his intelligent countenance into a condition of pudding-faced fatuity, and generally disguising Father O'Connor as Father Brown. The disguise, as I have said, was a deliberate piece of fiction, meant to bring out or accentuate the contrast that was the point of the comedy. There is

also in the conception, as in nearly everything I have ever written, a good deal of inconsistency and inaccuracy on minor points; not the least of such flaws being the general suggestion of Father Brown having nothing in particular to do, except to hang about in any household where there was likely to be a murder. A very charming Catholic lady I know once paid my detective priest the appropriate compliment of saying, "I am very fond of that officious little loafer."

Nevertheless, the incident of the Cambridge undergraduates, and their breezy contempt for the fugitive and cloistered virtue of a parish priest, stood for much more serious things in my life than my unfortunate, but merely professional, heap of corpses or massacre of characters. It brought me in a manner face to face once more with those morbid but vivid problems of the soul, to which I have earlier alluded, and gave me a great and growing sense that I had not found any real spiritual solution of them; though in certain external ways of proportion and practice, they trouble a man less in manhood than they do in youth. They still troubled me a good deal; but I might have sunk more and more into some sort of compromise or surrender of mere weariness, but for this sudden glimpse of the pit that is at all our feet. I was surprised at my own surprise. That the Catholic Church knew more about good than I did was easy to believe. That she knew more about evil than I did seemed incredible.

When people ask me, or indeed anybody else, "Why did you join the Church of Rome?" the first essential answer, if it is partly an elliptical answer, is, "To get rid of my sins." For there is no other religious system that does really profess to get rid of people's sins. It is confirmed by the logic, which to many seems startling, by which the Church deduces that sin confessed and adequately repented is actually abolished; and that the sinner does really begin again as if he had never sinned. And this brought me sharply back to those visions or fancies with which I have dealt in the chapter about childhood. I spoke there of the indescribable and indestructible certitude in the soul, that those first years of innocence were the beginning of something worthy, perhaps more worthy than any of the things that actually followed them. I spoke of the strange daylight, which was

something more than the light of common day, that still seems in my memory to shine on those steep roads down from Campden Hill, from which one could see the Crystal Palace from afar. Well, when a Catholic comes from Confession, he does truly, by definition, step out again into that dawn of his own beginning and look with new eyes across the world to a Crystal Palace that is really of crystal. He believes that in that dim corner, and in that brief ritual, God has really remade him in His own image. He is now a new experiment of the Creator. He is as much a new experiment as he was when he was really only five years old. He stands, as I said, in the white light at the worthy beginning of the life of a man. The accumulations of time can no longer terrify. He may be grey and gouty; but he is only five minutes old.

I am not here defending such doctrines as that of the Sacrament of Penance; any more than the equally staggering doctrine of the Divine love for man. I am not writing a book of religious controversy; of which I have written several and shall probably, unless violently restrained by my friends and relatives, write several more. I am here engaged in the morbid and degrading task of telling the story of my life; and have only to state what actually were the effects of such doctrines on my own feelings and actions. And I am, by the nature of the task, especially concerned with the fact that these doctrines seem to me to link up my whole life from the beginning, as no other doctrines could do; and especially to settle simultaneously the two problems of my childish happiness and my boyish brooding. And they specially affected one idea; which I hope it is not pompous to call the chief idea of my life; I will not say the doctrine I have always taught, but the doctrine I should always have liked to teach. That is the idea of taking things with gratitude, and not taking things for granted. Thus the Sacrament of Penance gives a new life, and reconciles a man to all living, but it does not do it as the optimists and the hedonists and the heathen preachers of happiness do it. The gift is given at a price, and is conditioned by a confession. In other words, the name of the price is Truth, which may also be

called Reality; but it is facing the reality about oneself. When the process is only applied to other people it is called Realism.

I began by being what the pessimists called an optimist; I have ended by being what the optimists would very probably call a pessimist. And I have never in fact been either, and I have never really changed at all. I began by defending vermilion pillar-boxes and Victorian omnibuses although they were ugly. I have ended by denouncing modern advertisements or American films even when they are beautiful. The thing that I was trying to say then is the same thing that I am trying to say now; and even the deepest revolution of religion has only confirmed me in the desire to say it. For indeed, I never saw the two sides of this single truth stated together anywhere, until I happened to open the Penny Catechism and read the words, "The two sins against Hope are presumption and despair."

I began in my boyhood to grope for it from quite the other end; the end of the earth most remote from purely supernatural hopes. But even about the dimmest earthly hope, or the smallest earthly happiness, I had from the first an almost violently vivid sense of those two dangers; the sense that the experience must not be spoiled by presumption or despair. To take a convenient tag out of my first juvenile book of rhymes, I asked through what incarnations or prenatal purgatories I must have passed, to earn the reward of looking at a dandelion. Now it would be easy enough, if the thing were worth while even for a commentator, to date that phrase by certain details, or guess that it might have been worded otherwise at a later time. I do not believe in Reincarnation, if indeed I ever did; and since I have owned a garden (for I cannot say since I have been a gardener) I have realised better than I did that there really is a case against weeds. But in substance what I said about the dandelion is exactly what I should say about the sunflower or the sun, or the glory which (as the poet said) is brighter than the sun. The only way to enjoy even a weed is to feel unworthy even of a weed. Now there are two ways of complaining of the weed or the flower; and one was the fashion in my youth and another is the fashion in my later days; but they are not only both wrong, but both wrong because the same thing

is right. The pessimists of my boyhood, when confronted with the dandelion, said with Swinburne:

I am weary of all hours

Blown buds and barren flowers

Desires and dreams and powers

And everything but sleep.

And at this I cursed them and kicked at them and made an exhibition of myself; having made myself the champion of the Lion's Tooth, with a dandelion rampant on my crest. But there is a way of despising the dandelion which is not that of the dreary pessimist, but of the more offensive optimist. It can be done in various ways; one of which is saying, "You can get much better dandelions at Selfridge's," or "You can get much cheaper dandelions at Woolworth's." Another way is to observe with a casual drawl, "Of course nobody but Gamboli in Vienna really understands dandelions," or saying that nobody would put up with the old-fashioned dandelion since the super-dandelion has been grown in the Frankfurt Palm Garden; or merely sneering at the stinginess of providing dandelions, when all the best hostesses give you an orchid for your buttonhole and a bouquet of rare exotics to take away with you. These are all methods of undervaluing the thing by comparison; for it is not familiarity but comparison that breeds contempt. And all such captious comparisons are ultimately based on the strange and staggering heresy that a human being has a right to dandelions; that in some extraordinary fashion we can demand the very pick of all the dandelions in the garden of Paradise; that we owe no thanks for them at all and need feel no wonder at them at all; and above all no wonder at being thought worthy to receive them. Instead of saying, like the old religious poet, "What is man that Thou carest for him, or the son of man that Thou regardest him?" we are to say like the discontented cabman, "What's this?" or like the bad-tempered Major in the club, "Is this a chop fit for a gentleman?" Now I not only dislike this attitude quite as much as the Swinburnian pessimistic attitude, but I think it

comes to very much the same thing; to the actual loss of appetite for the chop or the dish of dandelion-tea. And the name of it is Presumption and the name of its twin brother is Despair.

This is the principle I was maintaining when I seemed an optimist to Mr. Max Beerbohm; and this is the principle I am still maintaining when I should undoubtedly seem a pessimist to Mr. Gordon Selfridge. The aim of life is appreciation; there is no sense in not appreciating things; and there is no sense in having more of them if you have less appreciation of them. I originally said that a cockney lamp-post painted pea-green was better than no light or no life; and that if it was a lonely lamp-post, we might really see its light better against the background of the dark. The Decadent of my early days, however, was so distressed by it that he wanted to hang himself on the lamp-post, to extinguish the lamp, and to let everything relapse into aboriginal darkness. The modern millionaire comes bustling along the street to tell me he is an Optimist and has two million five thousand new lamp-posts, all ready painted not a Victorian pea-green but a Futuristic chrome yellow and electric blue, and that he will plant them over the whole world in such numbers that nobody will notice them, especially as they will all look exactly the same. And I cannot quite see what the Optimist has got to be Optimistic about. A lamp-post can be significant although it is ugly. But he is not making lamp-posts significant; he is making them insignificant.

In short, as it seems to me, it matters very little whether a man is discontented in the name of pessimism or progress, if his discontent does in fact paralyse his power of appreciating what he has got. The real difficulty of man is not to enjoy lamp-posts or landscapes, not to enjoy dandelions or chops; but to enjoy enjoyment. To keep the capacity of really liking what he likes; that is the practical problem which the philosopher has to solve. And it seemed to me at the beginning, as it seems to me now in the end, that the pessimists and optimists of the modern world have alike missed and muddled this matter; through leaving out the ancient conception of humility and the thanks of the unworthy. This is a matter much more important and interesting than my opinions; but, in point of fact, it

was by following this thin thread of a fancy about thankfulness, as slight as any of those dandelion clocks that are blown upon the breeze like thistledown, that I did arrive eventually at an opinion which is more than an opinion. Perhaps the one and only opinion that is really more than an opinion.

For this secret of antiseptic simplicity was really a secret; it was not obvious, and certainly not obvious at that time. It was a secret that had already been almost entirely left to, and locked up with, certain neglected and unpopular things. It was almost as if the dandelion-tea really were a medicine, and the only recipe or prescription belonged to one old woman, a ragged and nondescript old woman, rather reputed in our village to be a witch. Anyhow, it is true that both the happy hedonists and the unhappy pessimists were stiffened by the opposite principle of pride. The pessimist was proud of pessimism, because he thought nothing good enough for him; the optimist was proud of optimism, because he thought nothing was bad enough to prevent him from getting good out of it. There were valuable men of both these types; there were men with many virtues; but they not only did not possess the virtue I was thinking of, but they never thought of it. They would decide that life was no good, or that it had a great deal of good; but they were not in touch with this particular notion, of having a great deal of gratitude even for a very little good. And as I began to believe more and more that the clue was to be found in such a principle, even if it was a paradox, I was more and more disposed to seek out those who specialised in humility, though for them it was the door of heaven and for me the door of earth.

For nobody else specialises in that mystical mood in which the yellow star of the dandelion is startling, being something unexpected and undeserved. There are philosophies as varied as the flowers of the field, and some of them weeds and a few of them poisonous weeds. But they none of them create the psychological conditions in which I first saw, or desired to see, the flower. Men will crown themselves with flowers and brag of them, or sleep on flowers and forget them, or number and name all the flowers only in order to

grow a super-flower for the Imperial International Flower Show; or, on the other hand, trample the flowers like a stampede of buffaloes, or root up the flowers as a childish camouflage of the cruelty of nature, or tear the flowers with their teeth to show that they are enlightened philosophical pessimists. But this original problem with which I myself started, the utmost possible imaginative appreciation of the flower--about that they can make nothing but blunders, in that they are ignorant of the elementary facts of human nature; in that, working wildly in all directions, they are all without exception going the wrong way to work. Since the time of which I speak, the world has in this respect grown even worse. A whole generation has been taught to talk nonsense at the top of its voice about having "a right to life" and "a right to experience" and "a right to happiness." The lucid thinkers who talk like this generally wind up their assertion of all these extraordinary rights, by saying that there is no such thing as right and wrong. It is a little difficult, in that case, to speculate on where their rights came from; but I, at least, leaned more and more to the old philosophy which said that their real rights came from where the dandelion came from; and that they will never value either without recognising its source. And in that ultimate sense uncreated man, man merely in the position of the babe unborn, has no right even to see a dandelion; for he could not himself have invented either the dandelion or the eyesight.

I have here fallen back on one idle figure of speech from a fortunately forgotten book of verses; merely because such a thing is light and trivial, and the children puff it away like thistledown; and this will be most fitting to a place in which formal argument would be quite a misfit. But lest anyone should suppose that the notion has no relation to the argument, but is only a sentimental fancy about weeds or wild flowers, I will lightly and briefly suggest how even the figure fits in with all the aspects of the argument. For the first thing the casual critic will say is "What nonsense all this is; do you mean that a poet cannot be thankful for grass and wild flowers without connecting it with theology; let alone your theology?" To which I answer, "Yes; I mean he cannot do it without connecting it with

theology, unless he can do it without connecting it with thought. If he can manage to be thankful when there is nobody to be thankful to, and no good intentions to be thankful for, then he is simply taking refuge in being thoughtless in order to avoid being thankless." But indeed the argument goes beyond conscious gratitude, and applies to any sort of peace or confidence or repose, even unconscious confidence or repose. Even the nature-worship which Pagans have felt, even the nature-love which Pantheists have felt, ultimately depends as much on some implied purpose and positive good in things, as does the direct thanksgiving which Christians have felt. Indeed Nature is at best merely a female name we give to Providence when we are not treating it very seriously; a piece of feminist mythology. There is a sort of fireside fairytale, more fitted for the hearth than for the altar; and in that what is called Nature can be a sort of fairy godmother. But there can only be fairy godmothers because there are godmothers; and there can only be godmothers because there is God.

What has troubled me about sceptics all my life has been their extraordinary slowness in coming to the point; even to the point of their own position. I have heard them denounced, as well as admired, for their headlong haste and reckless rush of innovation; but my difficulty has always been to get them to move a few inches and finish their own argument. When first it was even hinted that the universe may not be a great design, but only a blind and indifferent growth, it ought to have been perceived instantly that this must forever forbid any poet to retire to the green fields as to his home, or to look at the blue sky for his inspiration. There would be no more of any such traditional truth associated with green grass than with green rot or green rust; no more to be recalled by blue skies than by blue noses amputated in a freezing world of death. Poets, even Pagans, can only directly believe in Nature if they indirectly believe in God; if the second idea should really fade, the first is bound to follow sooner or later; and, merely out of a sad respect for human logic, I wish it had been sooner. Of course a man might have an almost animal appreciation of certain accidents of form or colour in a rock or

a pool, as in a rag-bag or a dustbin; but that is not what the great poets or the great pagans meant by mysteries of Nature or the inspiration of the elemental powers. When there is no longer even a vague idea of purposes or presences, then the many-coloured forest really is a rag-bag and all the pageant of the dust only a dustbin. We can see this realisation creeping like a slow paralysis over all those of the newest poets who have not reacted towards religion. Their philosophy of the dandelion is not that all weeds are flowers; but rather that all flowers are weeds. Indeed it reaches to something like nightmare; as if Nature itself were unnatural. Perhaps that is why so many of them try desperately to write about machinery; touching which nobody has yet disputed the Argument from Design. No Darwin has yet maintained that motors began as scraps of metal, of which most happened to be scrapped; or that only those cars, which had grown a carburettor by accident, survived the struggle for life in Piccadilly. But whatever the reason, I have read modern poems obviously meant to make grass seem something merely scrubby and prickly and repugnant, like an unshaven chin.

That is the first note; that this common human mysticism about the dust or the dandelion or the daylight or the daily life of man does depend, and always did depend on theology, if it dealt at all in thought. And if it be next asked why this theology, I answer here-- because it is the only theology that has not only thought, but thought of everything. That almost any other theology or philosophy contains a truth, I do not at all deny; on the contrary, that is what I assert; and that is what I complain of. Of all the other systems or sects I know, every single one is content to follow a truth, theological or theosophical or ethical or metaphysical; and the more they claim to be universal, the more it means that they merely take something and apply it to everything. A very brilliant Hindu scholar and man of science said to me, "There is but one thing, which is unity and universality. The points in which things differ do not matter; it is only their agreement that matters." And I answered, "The agreement we really want is the agreement between agreement and disagreement. It is the sense that things do really differ, although they

are at one." Long afterwards I found what I meant stated much better by a Catholic writer, Coventry Patmore: "God is not infinite; He is the synthesis of infinity and boundary." In short, the other teachers were always men of one idea, even when their one idea was universality. They were always especially narrow when their one idea was breadth. I have only found one creed that could not be satisfied with a truth, but only with the Truth, which is made of a million such truths and yet is one. And even in this passing illustration about my own private fancy, this was doubly demonstrated. If I had wandered away like Bergson or Bernard Shaw, and made up my own philosophy out of my own precious fragment of truth, merely because I had found it for myself, I should soon have found that truth distorting itself into a falsehood. Even in this one case, there are two ways in which it might have turned on me and rent me. One would have been by encouraging the delusion to which I was most prone; and the other by excusing the falsehood which I thought most inexcusable. First, the very exaggeration of the sense that daylight and dandelions and all early experience are a sort of incredible vision would, if unbalanced by other truths, have become in my case very unbalanced indeed. For that notion of seeing a vision was dangerously near to my old original natural nightmare, which had led me to move about as if I were in a dream; and at one time to lose the sense of reality and with it much of the sense of responsibility. And again, on the side of responsibility, in the more practical and ethical sphere, it might have forced on me a sort of political Quietism, to which I was really as much of a conscientious objector as to Quakerism. For what could I have said, if some tyrant had twisted this idea of transcendental contentment into an excuse for tyranny? Suppose he had quoted at me my verses about the all-sufficiency of elementary existence and the green vision of life, had used them to prove that the poor should be content with anything, and had said, like the old oppressor, "Let them eat grass."

In a word, I had the humble purpose of not being a maniac, but especially of not being a monomaniac; and above all, of not being a monomaniac about a notion merely because it was my own. The notion was normal enough, and quite consistent with the Faith;

indeed, it was already a part of it. But only as a part of it could it have remained normal. And I believe this to be true of practically all the notions of which my ablest contemporaries have made new philosophies; many of them normal enough at the start. I have therefore come to the conclusion that there is a complete contemporary fallacy about the liberty of individual ideas; that such flowers grow best in a garden, and even grow biggest in a garden; and that in the wilderness they wither and die.

Here again, I am well aware that somebody will ask the natural and normally reasonable question: "Do you really mean that a man cannot object to people being asked to eat grass, unless he accepts your particular creed?" To which I will only answer for the moment, "Yes; I do mean that; but not exactly as you mean it." I will only add here, in passing, that what really revolts me and everybody else about that famous taunt of the tyrant is that it conveys some suggestion of treating men like beasts. I will also add that it would not remove my objection, even if the beasts had enough grass, or if the botanists had proved that grass is the most nutritious diet.

Now why do I offer here this handful of scrappy topics, types, metaphors all totally disconnected? Because I am not now expounding a religious system. I am finishing a story; rounding off what has been to me at least a romance, and very much of a mystery-story. It is a purely personal narrative that began in the first pages of this book; and I am answering at the end only the questions I asked at the beginning. I have said that I had in childhood, and have partly preserved out of childhood, a certain romance of receptiveness, which has not been killed by sin or even by sorrow; for though I have not had great troubles, I have had many. A man does not grow old without being bothered; but I have grown old without being bored. Existence is still a strange thing to me; and as a stranger I give it welcome. Well, to begin with, I put that beginning of all my intellectual impulses before the authority to which I have come at the end; and I find it was there before I put it there. I find myself ratified in my realisation of the miracle of being alive; not in some hazy

literary sense such as the sceptics use, but in a definite dogmatic sense; of being made alive by that which can alone work miracles.

I have said that this rude and primitive religion of gratitude did not save me from ingratitude; from sin which is perhaps most horrible to me because it is ingratitude. But here again I have found that the answer awaited me. Precisely because the evil was mainly of the imagination, it could only be pierced by that conception of confession which is the end of mere solitude and secrecy. I had found only one religion which dared to go down with me into the depths of myself. I know, of course, that the practice of Confession, having been reviled through three or four centuries and through the greater part of my own life, has now been revived in a belated fashion. The scientific materialists, permanently behind the times, have revived all that was reviled in it as indecent and introspective. I have heard that a new sect has started once more the practice of the most primitive monasteries, and treated the confessional as communal. Unlike the primitive monks of the desert, it seems to find a satisfaction in performing the ritual in evening-dress. In short, I would not be supposed to be ignorant of the fact that the modern world, in various groups, is now prepared to provide us with the advantages of Confession. None of the groups, so far as I know, professes to provide the minor advantage of Absolution.

I have said that my morbidities were mental as well as moral; and sounded the most appalling depths of fundamental scepticism and solipsism. And there again I found that the Church had gone before me and established her adamant foundations; that she had affirmed the actuality of external things; so that even madmen might hear her voice; and by a revelation in their very brain begin to believe their eyes.

Finally I said I had tried, however imperfectly, to serve justice; and that I saw our industrial civilisation as rooted in injustice, long before it became so common a comment as it is today. Anybody who cares to turn up the files of the great newspapers, even those supposed to be Radical newspapers, and see what they said about the

Great Strikes, and compare it with what my friends and I said at the same date, can easily test whether this is a boast or a brute fact. But anybody reading this book (if anybody does) will see that from the very beginning my instinct about justice, about liberty and equality, was somewhat different from that current in our age; and from all the tendencies towards concentration and generalisation. It was my instinct to defend liberty in small nations and poor families; that is to defend the rights of man as including the rights of property; especially the property of the poor. I did not really understand what I meant by Liberty, until I heard it called by the new name of Human Dignity. It was a new name to me; though it was part of a creed nearly two thousand years old. In short, I had blindly desired that a man should be in possession of something, if it were only his own body. In so far as materialistic concentration proceeds, a man will be in possession of nothing; not even his own body. Already there hover on the horizon sweeping scourges of sterilisation or social hygiene, applied to everybody and imposed by nobody. At least I will not argue here with what are quaintly called the scientific authorities on the other side. I have found one authority on my side.

This story, therefore, can only end as any detective story should end, with its own particular questions answered and its own primary problem solved. Thousands of totally different stories, with totally different problems have ended in the same place with their problems solved. But for me my end is my beginning, as Maurice Baring quoted of Mary Stuart, and this overwhelming conviction that there is one key which can unlock all doors brings back to me the first glimpse of the glorious gift of the senses; and the sensational experience of sensation. And there starts up again before me, standing sharp and clear in shape as of old, the figure of a man who crosses a bridge and carries a key; as I saw him when I first looked into fairyland through the window of my father's peep-show. But I know that he who is called Pontifex, the Builder of the Bridge, is called also Claviger, the Bearer of the Key; and that such keys were given him to bind and loose when he was a poor fisher in a far province, beside a small and almost secret sea.