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Mystery, Muddle and Morals.

Roman Catholic Sexual Ethics.

We will get right down to brass tacks, those tacks that nail down the carpet whereupon we shall call our celebrated mental tumbler, Mr. Gilbert Keith Chesterton. Unwittingly and—may we whisper?—unwily he will do us a good turn.

Dr. Geikie-Cobb, one of the very few original and interesting ecclesiastics of our day, has been so sound and secular as to marry a divorced gentleman to a lady to whom he was engaged. The case has enjoyed some slight publicity, because the gentleman involved had played some slight part in public life, and has been an object of animosity to the domineering and interfering old dowagers of the Royal Borough of Kensington. And Catholic Mr. Chesterton, that stout fighter for freedom, agreeing for once with the meagre and Protestant Bishop of London, is annoyed that the marriage should have received ecclesiastical sanction. In half-a-page of historical half-truth, weary wit, and sixpenny satire, contained in *G.K.'s Weekly* for June 29, 1929, Mr. Chesterton puts his case; from a column's-worth of faded journalistic fun there is to be extracted the writer's aim and object, the core of his desires. This is it, in full :—

"The fancy that it would be well to have an independent spiritual institution in the world to judge all this wickedness of the world [including, of course, the re-marriage of divorced people], seems to come to him [Dr. Geikie-Cobb] with a shock of surprise." The additions in brackets are our own.

So we know exactly where we stand, and against what we have to fight. If there be any meaning in words, what Mr. Chesterton, whose sincerity is beyond question, really wants is the restoration .of the Catholic Spiritual Power, that is, The Inquisition. To this we will return later.

For the present let us consider the case as it stands Whether Mr. Chesterton wished the gentleman in question, who is in the prime of life, to become permanently celibate, whether

he would have preferred this human pair to "live in sin," as it used to be called, and so undergo the social boycotting that such unions enjoy in civilized Christian England, we do not know. Possibly our Catholic apologist does not know himself; what he does know is that Dr. Geikie-Cobb has given legal and ecclesiastical sanction to the union, and that he, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, the Holy Catholic Church, the Protestant Bishop of London, and a miscellaneous collection of "respectable busy-bodies and holy cranks, including no doubt, our ascetic friend Jesus Christ, and his pot-paunched sire, Jahveh, are annoyed about it. They all feel hurt and flouted. Here are two people who wish to marry, presumably because they are in love, their circumstances and state of being, physical mental and moral, warranting the union; and Dr. Geikie-Cobb actually and nefariously consents to perform the ceremony.

To the merely lay mind there does not seem to be anything very remarkable or blameworthy or eccentric about the conduct of any of the actors in this social dramatic-comedy; there is nothing "to make a song about," to use the excellent phrase of the moment. But the possessor of the merely lay mind does not, like Mr. Chesterton, have to stand on his head for a living; he is not a professional tumbler or paradoxist; nor is he burdened with a spurious kind of myopic "mysticism," which is very like—not a whale, but—a mental eccentricity masquerading as a "religious" virtue. So the editor of *G.K.'s Weekly* and his theological friends of freedom come in "just here," all unexpected and uninvited as they are. *They* have a long and synco-pated even if discordant—song to sing; a sweet old tale to tell; it is this, and we give it merely in epitome, thus summarizing in a few words the whole meat, matter and meaning of the theological objection. Behold!:—

"God," whoever he may have been, being a legist (possibly a D.C.L. Why not?*), once and for all laid down deliberately certain rules, laws, regulations, and initiated certain rites, performances, ceremonies regarding his divine institution of marriage, and the damnable institution of divorce. Certainly this fellow "God" is the author and founder (according to their duly-accredited and paid representatives) of all religions, and each separate religion has a differing set of laws concerning human unions and disunions; but that, to a Catholic Mystic, is not significant; he knows, by divine intuition, that the only one of these sets of laws that is really genuine is his own. An odd coincidence; made odder by the fact that every rival religionist makes a precisely similar claim, and has precisely similar evi-

dence to support it. It is therefore clear that Mr. Chesterton's mystic view of marriage must be correct. Yet, somehow or other, we remain sceptical. There seems to be something wrong somewhere.

By one of those queer chances that sometimes occur, in the very week in which Mr. Chesterton declaimed against the impious and sinful nuptials of this naughty gentleman, there appeared the following interesting fragment of history in our admirable contemporary, *Notes and Queries*. This paper every week gives an extract or two from a journal just two centuries old. Here is one of the extracts that was published in the issue for June 29, 1929:—

At an *auto-de-fe*, held at the Coimbra in Portugal the 29th of May past, N.S., there came out in all sixty-seven persons, viz., twenty-nine men, and thirty-eight women. Two of the men had been guilty of apprehending persons pretending to be sent for that purpose from the Inquisition, of whom they got sums of money to let them go, when in reality they had no such power. A man and woman accused of dealing with the devil, and that to the woman the devil had appeared several times, and promised to enable her to perform cures. Three men speaking heretical words. One man for marrying a second wife, knowing the first to be living. One man and woman for approving the sect of Molinos, three men and thirteen women of idolatry, in attributing the divinity to a certain person. Forty-one for Judaism, among them Father Manoel Nunes Ferreyra, Abbot of Atalaya, aged fifty, accused of joining with the Jews in the ceremonies of the Law of Moses: He was degraded of his priesthood, and banished for seven years to the Island of St. Thomas; and another person named Lewis de Faria, aged eighty years, who was in the Inquisition in 1671, and was taken up lately for saying he then saved his life by owning himself a Jew, though he was not one; sentenced to be whipt and sent to the galleys for three years. The rest of the persons were some sentenced into banishment, some to the galleys, some to be whipt and imprisoned, etc., but none were to be burnt. (From the *Weekly Journal*: or, the *British Gazetteer*, Saturday, June 28, 1729.)

An interesting extract, from whatever point it be viewed. To the eye of a philosopher the evolution of our sociology, of our psychology, of our race itself, may be reconstructed from these few words, less than three hundred in all. It is not difficult to picture the state of society wherein such matters as those recorded in this weekly newspaper of two centuries ago were accepted by nearly everyone as commonplaces. By long and agonizing efforts, chiefly at the expense of the flower of our race, the "sports," the heretics, the infidels so-called, the Freethinkers, we have climbed out of the hell of suspicion, misery, torture and superstition that flourished, growing fat on human tears and blood, when we had what Mr. Chesterton calls "an independent spiritual institution in the world." It is into this ocean of blood and tears—the blood and tears of poor, crucified humanity—that the advocates of Roman Catholic domination would plunge mankind anew. Mr. Chesterton himself is no doubt personally incapable of cruelty. It is recorded that Torquemada was, in private life, a kindly and generous man. But gods in the skies have always been accustomed to batten on human blood and tears, and they always will. It is their natural food.

What are two centuries in the history of our race ? A flash. There is always danger of a return to that "independent spiritual institution" beloved by the editor of *G.K.'s Weekly*; there will still be danger until supernatural religion is destroyed. That is the meaning of Voltaire's *écrasez l'infame*, crush the infamous thing, infamous in that it is treachery against humanity. Would anyone but a Catholic deny this?

We will consider the extract from *Notes and Queries* more closely. It is evidently a matter of surprise to the recorder that there are no sentences of burning alive. But we must excuse the Holy Catholic Church for this unfortunate Omission. At this particular period there were not so many people as there had been who were willing to be burnt by "the independent spiritual power" of the Holy Inquisition. The work of the Reformers, the Humanists of the Rebirth, Erasmus, Montaigne, Rabelais, de Bergerac, Dolet, Vanini, Bruno, Margaret of Navarre, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and their circles, had begun to sink into the collective brain of European mankind. That sadistic old hag, the Holy Catholic Church, found her fangs beginning to decay. She could still snap and spit venom; she could rarely bite to slay. The "independent spiritual power in the world" had to content her bloated old body, her aching old bones, with comparatively mild cruelties, banishment, the galleys, whipping, imprisonment.

She was just as spiteful as her failing omnipotence allowed her to be.

Roman Catholicism in this country in this year of Grace, 1929, is a mild and sentimental thing, with a simper of love on her silly saint-lips, and a tender regard for the morbid and miserable head of "the blessed Saviour," making her appeal to the ignorant and emotional throw-backs of all grades of society. She is comparatively harmless, for the coward's reason that there is a majority against her. But in her "good" time, when her power was real, she was as we have seen her reported to be. She still possessed, and still "enjoyed," the power of sending people to the whipping-post and to the galleys for "dealing with the Devil," for "speaking heretical words," for "practising Judaism," for "approving the sect of Molinos." She was indeed, in her day, a kind of medieval and wholly brutal Super-Dora, first inventing artificial and impossible crimes, and then punishing people for committing them. She was the Spirit of Red Tape, the tape being the power of strangling independent thought, the red being the dye obtained from human blood.

It is this happily-moribund, superannuated, decaying monster, who is adored "even unto this day" by her devotees. Changelessness is her boast. Be it so; we know what enlightened Europe has against her, what the awakening sense of humanity has to destroy ere it can enter into the heritage of brotherhood that will follow the destruction of sectarianism.

Meantime, it is good that Freethinkers should know that there is in England a crowd of witch-hunting, Jew-baiting, Jesus-worshipping reactionaries who have the will but—Man be praised!—not the power to reintroduce the medieval Papal tyranny, the "independent spiritual institution" for which Mr. Chesterton yearns.

These left-overs from the Ages of Faith are superficially smooth, cultured, literary Catholics, but beneath a thin crust of intellectual culture there lurks the old love of interference with human liberty; the old hatred of heresy; the old fear of witchcraft; the old anger against the impious Jews, who have always refused to accept the gods of the Catholic Church.

It is scarcely surprising that Mr. Chesterton should inveigh against an ecclesiastic who acts with secular common-sense; for he is a member of an organization to which common-sense is fatal. Catholics have "mystic" reasons for their faith, and "mysticism" has been made the excuse for most of the evil wrought by man upon man, for nearly all the persecution, the brutality, the intolerance wherewith the history of man is

stained. And now, in 1929, here in England, the Catholics exclaim against divorce and other secular benefits, for no better or worse reason than that "God," who is merely one of millions of gods—all man-made, and therefore fictitious—is against them. "God," who is a compound of tradition and reaction, is naturally always against human freedom and human happiness; equally naturally, all advance into happier, nobler, wider conditions for humans is made in the teeth of Authority; and the chief Authority of the reactionaries is the Roman Catholic Church, run in heaven and hell and purgatory by its divine family of evil ghosts; and on earth by the Holy Father, who wields a waning "independent spiritual authority" over his obedient and slave-souled spiritual dupes.

Our essential quarrel with this execrable religion is that it interposes itself between man and truth, between man and woman, between man and freedom, between man and happiness, for no better reason than that one of its gods, a semi-mythical Jewish peasant, exalted celibacy above marriage. This nay-saying to life is treachery to humanity; one can do no better service to man than by aiding in the destruction of "God," the root of all our social and moral, and of most of our mental and physical, evils.

* Mr. Chesterton will probably—nay, certainly—regard this suggestion as "blasphemy," or even "flat" (as distinguished from corrugated) blasphemy. If he denies that "God" can be a D.C.L., we must point out that a God who is capable of begetting a child, but incapable of getting an academic degree, strikes us as being rather an imperfect kind of deity.

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