

A Gospel In a Ballad

Mr. G. W. E. Russell, the old-time friend of Gladstone, gives a very vivacious and discerning review in the Commonwealth of Mr. Gilbert Chesterton's new "Ballad of the White Horse."

He also interprets it in a striking way.

The Saxon White Horse

"Mr. Gilbert Keith Chesterton," says Mr. Russell, "a son of the soil of London, who knows its many-colored life and has described it enchantingly in prose and verse, has of late betaken himself to pastures new and fresh inspirations. In the first chapter of 'Tom Brown' (which is worth all the rest put together) we were taught when we were young to love the Vale of White Horse, with its glorious legends of Ashdown, where Alfred broke the Danish power, and made England a Christian land. After which crowning mercy, the pious King, that there might never be wanting a sign and a memorial to the countryside, carved out on the northern side of the chalk hill, the great Saxon White Horse, that gives its name to the Vale, over which it has looked these thousand years or more."

"Mr. Chesterton, having deserted London and quartered himself at Beaconsfield, has taken up his pilgrim-staff, and made his way through the beech-clad recesses of the Chilterns, past the spires of Oxford, to the steep slopes of those Berkshire downs, where men still cherish the story of Alfred with his Cakes and his Harp and his conquering sword.

Fighting for Christian Civilization

Mr. Chesterton has taken the tale of Alfred, fighting for the Christian civilization against the heathen nihilism, and has woven it into a ballad worthy of the name. It is a song of fighting; of impassioned yet disciplined strength; of deep humility and self-trust, and of victorious faith."

In this book, Mr. Russell says, is "Mr. Chesterton's true message to the age."

"He sees what our authorized teachers of Religion either fail to see, or, seeing, prefer to ignore. He sees that, masking their true natures under a parade of pseudo-science, the heathen have come into the inheritance of Christendom. He detects in their jargon of 'lesser breeds,' and the right of 'the Blood,' and 'the survival of the fittest,' and the supremacy of brute force, the negation of the Christian Ethic and the dethronement of the Christian Ideal. He sees that the Offense of the Cross has not ceased; that there is no discharge in the war to which the followers of the Cross are pledged; and that the eternal duty of the Church is not to court or caress but to fight and to conquer, the 'obscene empires of Mammon and Belial'."

The Sky Grows Darker

"The verbal medium through which this is conveyed," adds Mr. Russell, "shows afresh the writer's command over the illimitably rich resources of our English speech; the glowing, apt, 'inevitable' words, which all the time are lying ready to be used, but which most of us are too unskilful to discover.

"In Book I, King Alfred, who has fallen on evil times, seeks comfort, in a vision from the Mother of God:

"When our last bow is broken, Queen,
And our last javelin cast,
Under some sad, green, evening sky,
Holding a ruined cross on high,
Under warm westland grass to lie,
Shall we come home at last?"

And the reply is not what he desired.

"I tell you naught for your comfort,
Yea, naught for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet,
And the sea rises higher."

"That verse might serve as an epitome of the whole ballad.

"In Book II, Alfred, who has heard in the Voice of the Vision a call to arms, sets out to collect his forces for a more desperate encounter.

"I am that oft-defeated King,
Whose failure fills the land,
Who fled before the Danes of old,
Who chattered with the Danes for gold,
Who now upon the Wessex wold
Hardly has feet to stand."

"Yet, inspired by what the Blessed Mother has told him, he summons all true hearts to his side.

"For I go gathering Christian men
From sunken paving and ford and fen,
To die in a battle, God knows when,
By God, but I know why."

"Book III, discovers Alfred a wandering pilgrim, with an old harp on his arm. The heathen are in the land, and all around are the signs of their habitation

King Alfred gazed all sorrowful
At thistle and mosses grey.
Till a rally of Danes with shield and bill
Rolled drunk over the dome of the hill,
And, hearing of his harp and skill,
Men dragged him to their play.

Alfred a Wanderer

"And there they sat carousing, and singing their heathenish songs of slaughter and lust and the spoils of conquest.

Great wine like blood from Burgundy,
Cloaks like the clouds from Tyre,
And marble like solid moonlight,
And gold like frozen fire.

Smells that a man might swill in a cup,
Stones that a man might eat,
And the great smooth women, like ivory,
That the Turks sell in the street.

The King's Warning

"And then, on all this debauch of insolent animalism, falls the warning word of the unknown King.

Sirs, I am but a nameless man,
A rhymester without home,
Yet, since I come of the Wessex clay,
And carry the Cross of Rome,
I will even answer the mighty Earl—
That asked of Wessex men,
Why they be meek and monkish folk,
And bow to the White Lord's broken yoke;
Here is my answer then.

That on you is fallen the shadow,
And not upon the name;
That though we scatter and though we fly,
And you hang over us like the sky,
You are more tired of victory,
Than we are tired of shame.

That though you hunt the Christian man,
Like a hare on the hill-side,
The hare has still more heart to run,
Than you have heart to ride."

A High Christian King

"In Book VIII, we read the conclusion of the tale, and withal its interpretation:

In the days of the rest of Alfred,
When all these things were done,
And Wessex lay in a patch of peace,
Like a dog in a patch of sun—

The King sat in his orchard,
Among apples green and red,
With the little book in his bosom,
And the sunshine on his head

"And there he held his Court, and gave the law, and ruled with the strong hand, and punished the wrongdoer, and let his almsgiving flow like a river in flood; and bore himself in all things as a high Christian King. And when he began to draw towards his end, he bade his followers keep the Great White Horse scoured and clean, as an everlasting memorial of the great victory of Light over Darkness. Yet, even as he uttered his command, the shadow of a doubt fell upon his soul, and he remembered the Virgin Mother's prophecy that the skies would darken once again for a perilous storm, as he foresaw that the white symbol would grow dim, and that the once-conquered enemy would lift his hated head once more.

"I know that weeds shall grow in it
Faster than men can burn;
And, though they scatter now and go,
In some far century, sad and slow,
I have a vision, and I know
The heathen shall return.

They shall not come with warships,
They shall not waste with brands,
But books be all their eating,
And ink be on their hands.

They shall come as mild and monkish
clerks,
With many a scroll and pen;
And backward shall ye turn and gaze,
Desiring one of Alfred's days,
When pagans still were men.

By this sign ye shall know them,
The breaking of the sword,
And Man no more a free knight,
That loves or hates his lord.

Yea, this shall be the sign of them,
The sign of the dying fire;
And Man made like a half-wit,
That knows not of his sire.

What though they come with scroll and
pen,
And grave as a shaven clerk,
By this sign you shall know them,
That they ruin and make dark;

By all men bond to Nothing,
Being slaves without a lord,
By one blind idiot-world obeyed,
Too blind to be abhorred.

By terror and the cruel tales
Of curse in bone and kin,
By detail of the sinning,
And denial of the sin:

By thought a crawling ruin,
By life a leaping mire,
By a broken heart in the breast of the
world,
And the end of the world's desire;

By God and man dishonored,
By death and life made vain,
Know ye the old barbarian,
The barbarian come again.

When is great talk of trend and tide,
And wisdom and destiny,
Hail that undying heathen
That is sadder than the sea."

Rats on Auntie

"Auntie," said little Helen, "are you an Indian?"

"Gracious, child, of course not!" "What makes you ask such a foolish question?"

"Well, I saw a lot of scalps on your dressing table."—Montreal Herald.

WHAT A TELEPHONE GIRL HEARD

A very dramatic play, "The Woman" now exciting the United States, centres round a telephone girl and what she did and heard at the switchboard.

"William C. de Mile has endowed the telephone operator with a cloak of romance," says Current Literature. "Everything goes over the wires nowadays." Wanada Kelly, the plucky telephone girl at the Keswick, Washington, D. C., explains to the enamored Tom Blake son of Jim Blake, the most corrupt politician in Washington: "Why, we know more than all the newspapers put together—because we know both sides.

The Phone Girl's Fate

"No one thinks the telephone girl is human; she is regarded as merely a part of the switchboard. 'You see,' the girl goes on to say, 'one of the big central stations like Maine or North is the world. And it's all on the switchboard good and bad, love stories and death notices, winners and losers, all going in at once. And the phone girl is a sort of fate. . . . Oh, I tell you it's hard not to interfere sometimes when you've got the whole world under your two hands.'"

The play involves crooked politicians, frenzied finance, the skeleton of a gallant adventure rattling in its closet and Wanada, telephone girl tries to prevent that skeleton from coming out of its closet. For one thing she rubs out the record of the call of a certain number, and at the critical moment the plug of a telephone connection was knocked out, and she was called on to explain it.

Mark who is conducting the examination, turns to the subject of the interrupted telephone connection. "I might have knocked out the plug by accident," Wanada admits. "And," continues the questioner, "you might have done it on purpose."

Wanda—Why should I?

Mark: That's what we're going to find out.

Jim: You don't want to lose your job, do you?

Wanda: No; I need the money.

Mark: Oh, you need the money. Miss Kelly, Mr. Blake has offered you a great deal of money for that information.

Wanda: Oh, yes.

Mark: Will you accept his offer?

Wanda: Well, I—I need time to think it over.

Mark: Time is the one thing we cannot give you.

Jim: You knew that when you cut off our wire just now . . .

Wanda: . . . You see how I'm fixed.

Mark: Yes, but we've anticipated your objections. Here is an order from your general manager authorizing you to give us all the help you can. Does that remove your scruples?

Wanda: May I see it? (He hands her the paper.) Yes, it seems to be all right. (Giving it back.)

Mark: Now will you tell?

Wanda (innocently): But Governor Robertson, do you think it'd be right? Ought I to give away a customer? Now honestly, do you think it's a square deal?

Jim (exploding): D— it, she's kidding us. (Puffs angrily at his cigar.)

Mark (to Wanda, adopting a conciliatory tone): Come, Miss Kelly, don't force us to use harsh means. You help us, and we'll help you.

Mark: (referring to the book): Miss Kelly as an operator you must have your attention called to Section 641 of the Penal Code.

Wanda: Yes.

Then you realize that in refusing to transmit our message you rendered yourself liable to a fine of one thousand dollars, a year's imprisonment or both?

And your judge will see that I get both; is that it?

Mark: It is quite possible.

Mark: You admit that you refused to transmit our message, don't you?

Tom (quickly): Don't answer that. (A stir; the men turn toward Tom.)

Jim: Look here, Tom, you keep out of this.

Tom (to Jim): I've kept out long enough (To Mark): I won't let you weave a legal net around her, trick her, and threaten her with prison.

And he didn't, and later on there is this telephone talk between Tom and Wanda, which tells its own tale:

"(She puts the receiver to her ear and nestles into a comfortable position.)

A Live Wire

"Wanda: Hello. . . . Oh, yes. I'm through now. . . . Yes, they're going to drop. . . . I'm glad, too. . . . Oh, I see. . . . Can't you wait until tomorrow night? . . . I'll be here at six. . . . My, but you're impatient. . . . Oh, well, if you feel that way about it. . . . (Excitedly): No—no—no—no the wire. . . . No, stop, I tell you; I won't listen. . . . I don't care. . . . If you've got to say it, say it to my face. . . . Yes, yes, you can walk home with me. . . . Good-bye. . . . What? . . . I said 'good-bye'. . . . No—I'm not angry—that is, not very angry. . . . Tommy Hello! Hello! No, I don't want the operator. . . . Say, Lulu, what did you cut in for? . . . Oh, you did, did you? . . . Don't you know it's against the rules to be eavesdropping on the wire? . . . Yes, you did, too. . . . You heard what we were saying, and I don't know whether you'll be invited to the wedding or not. . . . Oh, I don't know. . . . What do you think of a white crepe de chine—cut princess—trimmed with hand embroidery—and a big shower bouquet—lilies of the valley and white orchids? . . . 'Curtain Falls Slowly.'"

On Modern Civilization

As one reads Mr. Algernon Blackwood's remarkable story, "The Centaur," one asks if civilization is the last word which evolution has to say to men like Terence O'Malley.

Today we give some remarkable passages which show how modern civilization affronted his fine mind, as it does the best minds the world over.

Call to the Simple Life

"There are some of us," he said gently, yet with a voice that held the trembling of an immense joy, "who know a more intimate relationship with their great Mother than the rest, perhaps. By the so-called Love of Nature, or by some artless simplicity of soul, wholly unmodern of course, perhaps felt by children of poets mostly, they lie caught close to her own deep life, knowing the immense sweet guidance of her mighty soul, divinely mothered, strangers to all the strife for material gain. . . ."

"He had heard the call to the simple life, the call to childhood.

"The Hebrew poets called it 'Before the Fall,' he went on, 'and later poets the Golden Age; today it shines through phrases like the Land of Heart's Desire, the Promised Land, Paradise, and what not; while the mind of saint and mystic have ever dreamed of it as union with their Deity. For it is possible and open to all, to every heart that is not blinded by the cloaking horror of materialism, which blocks the doorways of escape and prisons self behind the drab illusion that the outer form is the reality and not the inner thought. . . ."

Life's Fever

"The fever of modern life," which to O'Malley was the torture and unrest of a false, external civilization that trained the brain while it still left wars and baseness in the heart, would, he felt, drop from him like the symptoms of some fierce disease. The god of speed and mechanism that ruled the world today, urging men at ninety miles an hour to enter a Heaven where material gain was only a little sublimated and not utterly denied, would pass for the nightmare that it really was. In its place the cosmic life of undifferentiated simplicity, clean and sweet and big, would hold his soul in the truly everlasting arms.

At another time O'Malley saw "Men by the million, youth still in their hearts, yet slaving in darkened trap-like cages not merely to earn a competency but to pile more gold for things not really wanted; faces of greed round gambling tables; the pandemonium of Exchanges; even fair women, playing bridge through all a summer afternoon—the strife and lust and passion for possessions degrading every heart, choking the channels of simplicity. . . . Over the cities of the world he heard the demon Civilization sing its song of terror and desolation. Its music of destruction shook the nations. He saw the millions dance. And amid the bewildering ugly thunder of that sound few could catch the small sweet voice played by the Earth upon the little Pipes of Pan. . . . the fluting call of Nature to the Simple Life—which is the Inner."

A Halfpenny Paper

One day when he was in Russia this incident happened:

"Upon his table lay by chance—the Armenian hotel-keeper had evidently unearthed it for his benefit—a copy of a London halfpenny paper, a paper that feeds the public with the ugliest details of all the least important facts of life by the yard, inventing others when the supply is poor. He read it over vaguely, with a sense of cold distress that was half pain, half nausea. Somehow it stirred his sense of humor; he returned slowly to his normal, littler state. But it was not the contrast which made him smile; rather was it the chance juxtaposition of certain of the contents; for on the page facing the accounts of railway accidents, of people buried alive, explosions, giant strikes, crumpled air-men, and other countless horrors which modern inventions offered upon the altar of feverish Progress, he read a complacently boastful leader that extolled conquest of Nature men had learned by speed. The ability to pass from one point to another across the skin of the globe in the least possible time was sign of the development of the human soul."

Speed vs. Leisure

"The pompous flatulence of the language touched baths. He thought of the thousands who had read both columns and preened themselves upon that leader. He thought how they would pride themselves upon that latest contrivance for speeding their inert bodies from one point to another: annihilating distance; upon being able to get from Suburbia to the huge shops that created artificial wants, then filled them; from the poky villas with their wee sham gardens to the dingy offices; from dark airless East-End rooms to countless factories that pour out semi-fraudulent, unnecessary wares upon the world, explosives and weapons to destroy another nation, or cheapjack goods to poison their own—all in a few minutes less than they could do it in the week before.

"And then he thought of the leisure of the country folk and of those who knew how to be content without external possessions, to watch the sunset and the dawn with hearts that sought realities; showing the noble slowness of the seasons, the gradual growth of flowers and trees and crops, the unhurried dignity of Nature's grand procession, the repose-in-progress of the Mother-Earth."

A Splendid Group

Wherever he went he saw things which showed him the foolishness of what we call civilization. On the Mediterranean "He went to the other side of the vessel and watched the peasants on the lower deck. Their dirt seemed nothing by comparison. It was only on their clothes and bodies. The odor of this unwashed humanity was almost sweet and wholesome. It cleansed the sickly taint of that other scent from his palate; it washed his mind of thoughts as well.

"He stood there long in dreaming silence, while the sunlight on Olympus turned from gold to rose, and the sea took on the colors of the fading sky. He watched a dark Kurd baby sliding down the tarpaulin. A kitten was playing with a loose end of rope too heavy for it to move. Further off a huge fellow with bared chest and the hands of Colossus sat on a pile of canvas playing softly on his wooden pipes. The dark hair fell across his eyes, and a group of women listened idly while they busied themselves with the cooking of the evening meal. Immediately beneath him a splendid-eyed young woman crammed a baby to her naked breast. The kitten left the rope and played with the tassel of her scarlet shawl. . . ."

"And as he heard those pipes and watched the grave, untamed, strong faces of those wild peasant men and women, he understood that low though they might be in the scale of evolution, there was yet absent from them the touch of that deteriorating something which civilization painted into those other countenances. But whether the word he sought was degradation or whether it was shame, he could not tell. In all they did, the way they moved, their dignity and independence, there was this something, he felt, that bordered on being impressive.

Their Elemental Nature

"Their wants were few, their worldly possessions in a bundle, yet they had this thing that set them in a place apart, if not above, these others: beyond that simpering attache for all his worldly diplomacy, that engineer with brains and skill, those painted women with their clever playing upon the feelings and desires of their kind. There was this difference that set the ragged, dirty crew in a proud and quiet atmosphere that made them seem almost distinguished by comparison, and certainly more desirable. Rough and untutored though they doubtless were, they still possessed 'unspoiled that deeper and more elemental nature that bound them closer to the earth. It needed training, guidance, purifying; yes, but, in the last resort, was it not of greater spiritual significance and value than the mode of comparatively recently developed reason by which Civilization had produced these other types.

"He watched them long. The sun sank out of sight, the sea turned dark, ten thousand stars shone softly in the sky, and while the steamer swung about and made for the peaked Andros and the coast of Greece, he still stood on in reverie and wonder. The wings of his great Dream stirred mightily. . . . and he saw pale millions of men and women trooping through the gates of horn and ivory into that Garden where they should find peace and happiness in clean simplicity close to the Earth."

O'Malley's heart dwelt ever in the Golden Age of the Earth's first youth, and at last—he was coming home. He would not believe in death and going away. "There is only going home, 'escape and freedom. I tell you there's only that. It's nothing but joy and splendor when you really understand.

How other men looked out on life as opposed to O'Malley's view was well put by his friend, who said:

"I loathe, loathe the spirit of today with its cheapjack inventions, and smoother of sham universal culture, its murderous superfluities and sordid vulgarity without enough real sense of beauty left to see that a daisy is nearer heaven than an airship—"

"I thought of the morrow—of my desk in the life insurance office, of the clerks with the oiled hair brushed back from the forehead, all exactly alike, trousers neatly turned up to show fancy socks from bargain sales, their pockets full of cheap cigarettes, their minds busy with painted actresses and the names of horses! A life insurance office! All London paying yearly sums to protect themselves against—against the most interesting moment of life. Premiums upon escape and freedom!"

Just Poured Him

A man returned to his native village after having emigrated to Kansas some twenty years previous. He asked about different villagers he had known in the old days, and finally of the town drunkard of his time.

"Oh, he's dead," was the reply.

"Well, well, dead and buried is he?"

"Nope; they didn't bury him."

"Didn't bury him!" exclaimed the former resident. "Well then what did they do with him?"

"Oh, they just poured him back in the jug!"

—Montreal Herald.

Little May and her mother were having lunch together, and the mother, who was always trying to impress facts upon her young daughter, said:

"These little sardines, Mary, are sometimes eaten by the larger fish."

Mary gazed at the sardines in wonder, and then asked:

"But, mother, how do the big fish get the tins open?"