

Aphorisms from the Work of G. K. Chesterton

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For Chesterton's use of paradox, see Hugh Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1947). Also helpful is Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 19-20: "Paradox has a way of turning language against itself by asserting both terms of a contradiction at once. Pursued for its own sake, paradox can seem vulgar or meaningless; it is extremely fatiguing to the mind. But pursued for the sake of wordless truth, it can rend veils and even, like the grotesque, approach the holy. Because it breaks rules, paradox can penetrate to new and unexpected realms of experience, discovering relationships syntax generally obscures."

A saint is one who exaggerates what the world neglects.

There is the tragedy that is founded on the worthlessness of life; and there is the deeper tragedy that is founded on the worth of it. The one sort of sadness says that life is so short that it can hardly matter; the other that life is so short that it will matter forever.

Jokes are generally honest. Complete solemnity is almost always dishonest.

"The first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything." This famous quotation actually comes from page 211 of Emile Cammaerts' book *The Laughing Prophets* (1937) in which he quotes Chesterton as having Father Brown say (in "The Oracle of the Dog" from 1923): "It's the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense." Cammaerts then interposes his own analysis between further quotes from Father Brown: "It's drowning all your old rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition." The first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything: 'And a dog is an omen and a cat is a mystery.'" Note that the remark about believing in anything is outside quotes—it is from Cammaerts.

The modern critics of religious authority are like those who attack the police without ever heard of the burglars. (from *Orthodoxy*)

It may be possible to have a good debate over whether or not Jesus believed in fairies. Alas, it is impossible to have any sort of debate over whether or not Jesus believed that rich people were in big trouble—there is too much evidence on the subject and it is overwhelming.

An adventure is an inconvenience, rightly considered.

The objection to an aristocracy is that it is a priesthood without a god. (St. Francis of Assisi, 122)

The function of the imagination is not to make strange things settled, so much as to make settled things strange.

Our Lord commanded us to forgive our enemies, but not to have none.

Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die.

Pragmatism is a [philosophy] of human needs, and one of the first of human needs is to be something more than a pragmatist.

The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies, probably because they are generally the same people.

The poet asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits.

Blasphemy depends upon a philosophical conviction. Blasphemy depends on belief, and is fading with it. If anyone doubts this, let him sit down seriously and try to think blasphemous thoughts about Thor.

A good novel tells us the truth about its hero; but a bad novel tells us the truth about its author.

Merely having an open mind is nothing. The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid.

There is more simplicity in the man who eats caviare on impulse than in the man who eats grape-nuts on principle.

We must make up our minds to be ignorant of much, if we would know anything.

Tolerance is the virtue of people who don't believe anything.

A key has no logic to its shape. Its logic is: it turns the lock.

If Americans can be divorced for 'incompatibility of temper,' I cannot conceive why they are not all divorced. I have known many happy marriages, but never a compatible one.

Americans are the people who describe their use of alcohol and tobacco as vices.

Business, especially big business, is now organized like an army. It is, as some would say, a sort of mild militarism without bloodshed; as I say, a militarism without the military virtues..... A businessman is the only man who is forever apologizing for his occupation.

The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums.

Rossetti makes the remark somewhere, bitterly but with great truth, that the worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank.

Evil comes at leisure like the disease; good comes in a hurry like the doctor.

What is bad in the candid friend is simply that he is not candid. He is keeping something back--his own gloomy pleasure in saying unpleasant things.

The one stream of poetry which is continually flowing is slang.

Journalism largely consists in saying "Lord Jones Dead" to people who never knew Lord Jones was alive.

The artistic temperament is a disease that afflicts amateurs.

It is in private life that we find great characters. They are too great to get into the public world.

There is but an inch of difference between the cushioned chamber and the padded cell.

All men are ordinary men; the extraordinary men are those who know it.

Silence is the unbearable repartee.

Nine times out of ten, the coarse word is the word that condemns an evil and the refined word the word that excuses it.

It is better to speak wisdom foolishly, like the saints, rather than to speak folly wisely, like the dons.

Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about.

The anarchist ... is disappointed with the future as well as the past.

Truth must necessarily be stranger than fiction; for fiction is the creation of the human mind and therefore congenial to it.

The people who are most bigoted are the people who have no convictions at all.

The dipsomaniac and the abstainer are not only both mistaken, but they both make the same mistake. They both regard wine as a drug and not as a drink.

The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as foreign land.

It is the test of a good religion whether you can make a joke about it.

This alarming growth of good habits really means a too great emphasis on those virtues which mere custom can ensure, it means too little emphasis on those virtues which custom can never quite ensure, sudden and splendid virtues of inspired pity or of inspired candour.

No man's really good till he knows how bad he is, or might be; till he's realised exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talking about 'criminals,' as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away; till he's got rid of all the dirty self-deception of talking about low types and deficient skulls; till he's squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat.

The whole case for Christianity is that a man who is dependent upon the luxuries of life is a corrupt man, spiritually corrupt, politically corrupt, financially corrupt. There is one thing that Christ and all the Christian saints have said with a sort of savage monotony. They have said simply that to be rich is to be in peculiar danger of moral wreck.

To be clever enough to get all that money, one must be stupid enough to want it.

For religion all men are equal, as all pennies are equal, because the only value in any of them is that they bear the image of the king.

Despair does not lie in being weary of suffering, but in being weary of joy.

If there were no God, there would be no atheists.

There are only three things in the world that women do not understand; and they are liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.

Everything has in fact another side to it, like the moon, the patroness of nonsense. Viewed from that other side, a bird is a blossom broken loose from its chain of stalk, a man a quadruped begging on its hind legs, a house a gigantesque hat to cover a man from the sun, a chair an apparatus of four wooden legs for a cripple with only two. This is the side of things which tends most truly to spiritual wonder.

[George Bernard] Shaw is like the Venus of Milo; all that there is of him is admirable.

The worst tyrant is not the man who rules by fear; the worst tyrant is he who rules by love and plays on it as on a harp.

The globe-trotter lives in a smaller world than the peasant. He is always breathing the air of locality. . . . The man in the cabbage field has seen nothing at all; but he is thinking of the things that unite men—hunger and babies, and the beauty of women, and the promise or menace of the sky.

The best way a man could test his readiness to encounter the common variety of mankind would be to climb down a chimney into any house at random, and get on as well as possible with the people inside. And that is essentially what each one of us did on the day that he was born.

It might be reasonably maintained that the true object of all human life is play. Earth is a task garden; heaven is a playground. To be at last in such secure innocence that one can juggle with the universe and the stars, to be so good that one can treat everything as a joke—that may be, perhaps, the real end and final holiday of human souls.

Co-educate as much as you will, there will always be a wall between the sexes until love or lust breaks it down.

There are no uneducated men. They may escape the trivial examinations, but not the tremendous examinations of existence. The dependence of infancy, the enjoyment of animals, the love of woman, and the fear of death—these are more frightful and more fixed than all conceivable forms of the cultivation of the mind.

It is true that in certain acute and painful crises of oppression or disgrace, discontent is a duty and shame should call us like a trumpet. But it is not true that man should look at life with an eye of discontent, however high-minded. It is not true that in his primary, naked relation to the world, in his relation to sex, to pain, to comradeship, to the grave or to the weather, man ought to make discontent his ideal; it is black lunacy. Half his poor little hopes of happiness hang on his thinking a small house pretty, a plain wife charming, a lame foot not unbearable, and bad cards not so bad. The voice of the special rebels and prophets, recommending

discontent, should, as I have said, sound now and then suddenly, like a trumpet. But the voices of the saints and sages, recommending contentment, should sound unceasingly, like the sea.

Unfortunately, if you regard Nature as a mother, you discover that she is a step-mother. The main point of Christianity was this: that Nature is not our mother: Nature is our sister. We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same father; but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate. This gives to the typically Christian pleasure in this earth a strange touch of lightness that is almost frivolity.

Man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind; praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul. Pessimism is at best an emotional half-holiday; joy is the uproarious labour by which all things live.

There are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having one ally. It may be conceded to the mathematicians that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one. That is why, in spite of a hundred disadvantages, the world will always return to monogamy. *The Man Who Was Thursday*, 139

Fallacies do not cease to be fallacies even if they become fashionable.

A citizen can hardly distinguish between a tax and a fine, except that the fine is generally much lighter.

Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural.

“My country, right or wrong,” is a thing that no patriot would think of saying except in a desperate case. It is like saying, “My mother, drunk or sober.”

It has taken me twenty years of studied self-restraint, aided by the natural decay of my faculties, to make me dull enough to be accepted as a reasonable person by the average man.

Before you pull any fence down, always pause long enough to find out why it was put there in the first place.

The poor man really has a stake in the country. The rich man hasn't; he can go away to New Guinea in a yacht. The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the rich have always objected to being governed at all.

The sentimentalist is the man who wants to eat his cake and have it. He has no sense of honor about ideas; he will not see that one must pay for an idea as for anything else.

The superhuman is all the more uncanny when it is beneficent. That is the root of the fear of God.

All ceremony consists in a reversal of the obvious. Thus men, when they wish to be priests or judges, dress up like women.

Freedom of speech means practically [i.e., in practice] in our modern civilisation that we must only talk about unimportant things.

If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are frightful danger of seeing it for the first time.

Individually, men may present a more or less rational appearance, eating, sleeping, scheming. But humanity as a whole is changeful, mystical, fickle, delightful. Men are men, but Man is a woman.

There is no such thing as a boring subject. There are only bored people.

The Pre-Raphaelites [discovered] what had been hidden since the thirteenth century under loads of idle civilisation, the truth that simplicity and a monastic laboriousness is the happiest of all things; the great truth that purity is the only atmosphere for passion; the great truth that silver is more beautiful than gold.

The person who makes a vow makes an appointment with himself at some distant time or place. The danger of it is that himself should not keep the appointment. And in modern times this terror of one's self, of the weakness and mutability of one's self, has perilously increased, and is the real basis of the objection to vows of any kind.

The Iliad is great only because all life is a battle, the Odyssey because all life is a journey, the Book of Job because all life is a riddle.

There are those who enjoy "feelings too much to enjoy anything simply beautiful. They are aesthetes; and the definition of an aesthete is a man who is experienced enough to admire a good picture, but not inexperienced enough to see it."

Wit is a sword; it is meant to make people feel the point as well as see it.

The only way to be sure of catching a train is to miss the one before it.

It is an equally awful truth that four and four makes eight, whether you reckon the thing out in eight onions or eight angels, eight bricks or eight bishops, eight minor poets or eight pigs.

I say that a man must be certain of his morality for the simple reason that he has to suffer for it.

It is the beginning of all true criticism of our time to realize that it has really nothing to say, at the very moment when it has invented so tremendous a trumpet for saying it. (1923)

I say you cannot really understand any myths till you have found that one of them is not a myth. Turnip ghosts mean nothing if there are no real ghosts. Forged bank-notes mean nothing if there are no real bank-notes. Heathen gods mean nothing, and must always mean nothing, to those of us that deny the Christian God. When once a god is admitted, even a false god, the Cosmos begins to know its place: which is the second place. When once it is the real God the Cosmos falls down before Him, offering flowers in spring as flames in winter. *A Miscellany of Men*

Believe, amid whatever madness or moral failure, that your life and temperament have some object on earth. Believe that you have something to give the world which cannot otherwise be given. ("Philosophy of Browning" in *Robert Browning*)

Impartiality is a pompous name for indifference, which is an elegant name for ignorance.

The whole curse of the last century has been what is called the Swing of the Pendulum; that is, the idea that Man must go alternately from one extreme to the other. It is a shameful and even shocking fancy; it is the denial of the whole dignity of mankind. When Man is alive he stands still. It is only when he is dead that he swings. "The New House" in *Alarms and Discursions*

Tradition, which some have called a dead thing, is really a thing far more living than the intellect. There is a dark kinship and brotherhood of all mankind which is much too deep to be called heredity or to be in any way explained in scientific formulae. "Christmas Books"

It is always wiser to consider not so much why a thing is not enjoyable, as why we ourselves do not enjoy it. Illustrated London News, Feb. 28, 1931

There is a chasm between the man who believes in the soul, in the sense of the will, and the man who only believes in what he calls law, and what I call fate. It is a difference of kind, like the difference between organic and inorganic matter; or, in other words, between dead things and living ones. Illustrated London News Feb. 21, 1925)

The mystery of life is the plainest part of it.

Keep before your eyes the supreme adventure of virtue. If you are brave, think of the man who was braver than you. If you are kind, think of the man who was kinder than you. That is what was meant by having a patron saint. "The War on Holidays," *Utopia of Usurers*

The Christian is quite free to believe that there's a considerable amount of settled order and an inevitable development in the universe. But the materialist is not allowed to admit into his spotless machine the slightest speck of spiritualism or miracle.

I am quite ready to respect another man's faith; but it is too much to ask that I should respect his doubt, his worldly hesitations and fictions, his political bargain and make-believe.

Once abolish the God, and government becomes the God.

Bigotry may be roughly defined as the anger of men who have no opinions . . . the appalling frenzy of the indifferent.

I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.

It is rather ridiculous to ask a man just about to be boiled in a pot and eaten, at a purely religious feast, why he does not regard all religions as equally friendly and fraternal.

That which is ridiculous deserves to be ridiculed.

I owe my success to having listened respectfully to the very best advice, and then going away and doing the exact opposite.

Nothing so much threatens the safety of democracy as assuming that democracy is safe. And that is another version of the same arrogant error; that, because you and I are democrats (if we are) we assume that all thinking people of all schools of thought must believe in democracy. If we go on assuming it much longer, there will be nobody left who does believe in democracy. The Illustrated London News, August 29, 1931.

A change of opinions is almost unknown in an elderly military man." A Utopia of Usurers

At the funeral of an atheist, an onlooker who noticed how nattily the deceased was attired, commented to Chesterton, “All dressed up, with nowhere to go!” Chesterton replied grimly, “I bet he wishes that were so.”

The real trouble with this world of ours is not that it is an unreasonable world, nor even that it is a reasonable one. The commonest kind of trouble is that it is nearly reasonable, but not quite. Life is not an illogicality; yet it is a trap for logicians. It looks just a little more mathematical and regular than it is; its exactitude is obvious, but its inexactitude is hidden; its wildness lies in wait.

The doctrine of original sin is the only philosophy empirically validated by the centuries of recorded human history.

When a man begins to think that the grass will not grow at night unless he lies awake to watch it, he generally ends either in an asylum or on the throne of an emperor. (from *Robert Browning*)

The sin and sorrow of despotism is not that it does not love men, but that it loves them too much and trusts them too little. (also from *Robert Browning*)

Comradeship and serious joy are not interludes in our travel; but [. . .] rather our travels are interludes in comradeship and joy, which through God shall endure for ever. The inn does not point to the road; the road points to the inn. And all roads point at last to an ultimate inn, where we shall meet Dickens and all his characters; and when we drink again it shall be from the great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world.

You say grace before meals. All right.
But I say grace before the play and the opera,
And grace before the concert and pantomime,
And grace before I open a book,
And grace before sketching, painting,
Swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing;
And grace before I dip the pen in the ink.

Progress is Providence without God. That is, it is a theory that everything has always perpetually gone right by accident. It is a sort of atheistic optimism, based on an everlasting coincidence far more miraculous than a miracle.

There are two kinds of people in the world, the conscious dogmatists and the unconscious dogmatists. I have always found myself that the unconscious dogmatists were by far the most dogmatic. *Generally Speaking*, 22.

I believe in getting into hot water. I think it keeps you clean.

Materialists and madmen never have doubts.

For some strange reason people must plant fruit trees in a graveyard. We seem to find life only among the dead. We have our feet set forward and our faces turned back. We can make the future luxuriant and gigantic only as long as we are thinking about the past.

The free man owns himself. He can damage himself with either eating or drinking; he can ruin himself with gambling. If he does he is certainly a damn fool, and he might possibly be a damned soul; but if he may not, he is not a free man any more than a dog.

Impartiality is a pompous name for indifference, which is an elegant name for ignorance.

The most incredible thing about miracles is that they happen. A few clouds in heaven do come together into the staring shape of one human eye. A tree does stand up in the landscape of a doubtful journey in the exact and elaborate shape of a note of interrogation. . . . In short, there is in life an element of elfin coincidence which people reckoning on the prosaic may perpetually miss. As it has been well expressed in the paradox of Poe, wisdom should reckon on the unforeseen. G. K. Chesterton, "The Blue Cross"

There comes a time in the late afternoon, when the children tire of their games. It is then that they turn to torturing the cat.

The traveler sees what he sees, the tourist sees what he has come to see.

There is no end to the dissolution of ideas, the destruction of all tests of truth, that has become possible since men abandoned the attempt to keep a central and civilized Truth, to contain all truths and trace out and refute all errors. Since then, each group has taken one truth at a time and spent the time in turning it into a falsehood. We have had nothing but movements; or in other words, monomanias. But the Church is not a movement but a meeting-place; the trysting-place of all the truths in the world.

I would thank you from the bottom of my heart, but for you my heart has no bottom.

It is not bigotry to be certain we are right; but it is bigotry to be unable to imagine how we might possibly have gone wrong.

When men pause in the pursuit of happiness, seriously to picture happiness, they have always made what may be called a 'primitive' picture. Men rush towards complexity; but they yearn towards simplicity. They try to be kings; but they dream of being shepherds.

When learned men begin to use their reason, then I generally discover that they haven't got any. Illustrated London News (7 November 1908)

Men do not differ much about what things they will call evils; they differ enormously about what evils they will call excusable. - Illustrated London News (1909-10-23)

Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese. - *Alarms and Discursions* (1910)

What embitters the world is not excess of criticism, but an absence of self-criticism. - "Sidelights on New London and Newer New York"

The simplification of anything is always sensational. - *Varied Types*

I do not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act; but I do believe in a fate that falls on them unless they act.

Religious unity can look like a carnival and religious liberty can look like a funeral. (Illustrated London News, December 28, 1929, after GKC had attended a Eucharistic Congress in Dublin)

You should not look a gift universe in the mouth.

Whatever was the man who built the pyramids, one feels that he must (to put it mildly) have been a clever man.

Compromise used to mean that half a loaf was better than no bread. Among modern statesmen it really seems to mean that half a loaf is better than a whole loaf.

Jane Austen was born before those bonds, which (we are told) protected women from truth, were burst by the Brontes or elaborately untied by George Eliot. Yet the fact remains that Jane Austen knew more about men than either of them. Jane Austen may have been protected from truth: but it was precious little of truth that was protected from her.

You cannot grow a beard in a moment of passion.

Our fathers did not talk about psychology; they talked about a knowledge of Human Nature. But they had it, and we have not. They knew by instinct all that we have ignored by the help of information. For it is exactly the first facts of human nature that are now being ignored by humanity.

Inner light is the worst kind of lighting. When Jones follows the inner light, he mostly follows Jones.

If we ever get the English back on to the English land they will become again a religious people, if all goes well, a superstitious people. The absence from modern life of both the higher and the lower forms of faith is largely due to a divorce from nature and the trees and clouds. If we have no more turnip ghosts it is chiefly from the lack of turnips. —Heretics

Nobody will die for a syllogism.

A man's soul is as full of voices as a forest, there are ten thousand tongues there like all the tongues of the trees: fancies, follies, memories, madnesses, mysterious fears, and more mysterious hopes.

The greatest of all illusions is the illusion of familiarity.

They say travel broadens the mind, but you must have the mind.

A weak mind is like a microscope, which magnifies trifling things but cannot receive great ones.

A problem well stated is a problem half solved.

You could compile the worst book in the world entirely out of selected passages from the best writers in the world.

God [has] written, not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he [has] planned as perfect, but which [has] necessarily been left to human actors and stage-managers, who [have] since made a great mess of it.

The purpose of Christianity is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comforted.

Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.

For children are innocent and love justice, while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy.

He may be mad, but there's method in his madness. There nearly always is method in madness. It's what drives men mad, being methodical."

Here dies another day

During which I have had eyes, ears, hands
And the great world round me;
And with tomorrow begins another,
Why am I allowed two? (“Evening”)

The Church is a house with a hundred gates; and no two men enter at exactly the same angle.

One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak.

A stiff apology is a second insult. The injured party does not want to be compensated because he has been wronged; he wants to be healed because he has been hurt.

One can hardly think too little of one’s self. One can hardly think too much of one’s soul.

[T]hinking is a narrowing process. It leads to what people call dogma. A man who thinks hard about any subject for several years is in horrible danger of discovering the truth about it....

Man has mastery of all things except himself.

Drink because you are happy, but never because you are miserable.

Beware of luxury, the eternal enemy of Liberty.

Never invoke the gods unless you really want them to appear. It annoys them very much.

A yawn is a silent shout.

A moderate is a man who wants his children to be moderately clean, houses to be moderately sanitary, and their inhabitants to be moderately sober.

When it comes to life the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.

When we were children we were grateful to those who filled our stockings at Christmas time. Why are we not grateful to God for filling our stockings with legs?

“How beautiful it would be,” Chesterton said of Times Square in New York City, “for someone who could not read.”

Modernity has given ultimate authority to the world-view of a slightly sleepy businessman right after lunch.

The fatal metaphor of progress, which means leaving things behind us, has utterly obscured the real idea of growth, which means leaving things inside us.

The world will never starve for want of wonders, but only for want of wonder.

The true object of all human life is play.

Don't ever take a fence down until you know the reason it was put up.

The trouble with always trying to preserve the health of the body is that it is so difficult to do without destroying the health of the mind.

Friends are those with whom our faults are safe.

Being broad-minded ... often means being blank-minded.

The man who knocks on the door of the brothel is looking for God.

Men may keep a sort of level of good, but no man has ever been able to keep on one level of evil. That road goes down an down. The kind man drinks and turns cruel; the frank man kills and lies about it. (Father Brown in "The Flying Stars")

[Evil] opens door after door in hell, and always into smaller and smaller chambers. This is the real case against crime, that a man does not become wilder and wilder, but only meaner and meaner. (Father Brown in "The Sign of the Broken Sword") NB: "mean" does not here signify "cruel" but rather "shabby, inferior, petty, ignoble, lacking distinction and eminence."

Not facts first; truth first.

Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity.

[The clique] is wrong because it actually discourages the great man from talking plainly. The priests and priestesses of the temple take a pride in the oracle remaining oracular.

[Humor] involves some confession of human weakness; whereas wit is rather the human intellect exerting its full strength perhaps upon some small point.

[We] suffer from a lack of imagination [because we] cannot see all round a subject; or [because we] cannot see anything against the background of everything else. (from "The Outline of Liberty")

Will made the world. Will wounded the world; the same divine Will gave to the world for the second time its chance; the same human Will can for the last time make its choice. (from "The Outline of Liberty")

We do not laugh when a tree or a rock tumbles down, because we do not know the sense of self-esteem or serious importance within.

In short, if I had only one sermon to preach, it would be one that would profoundly annoy the congregation, by bringing to their attention the permanent challenge of the Church. If I had only one sermon to preach, I should feel specially confident that I should not be asked to preach another. (from *The Common Man*, first published in 1950)

The civilised man, like the religious man, is one who recognizes the strange and irritating fact that something exists beside himself.

No truth which I find can deny that I am seeking the truth. My mind cannot find anything which denies my mind. ("The Long Bow," in *Alarms and Discursions*)

Any one thinking of the Holy Child as born in December would mean by it exactly what we mean by it; that Christ is not merely a summer sun of the prosperous but a winter fire for the unfortunate.

Truth is sacred, and if you tell the truth too often nobody will believe it.

He is a very shallow critic who cannot see an eternal rebel in the heart of a conservative.

A thing may be too sad to be believed or too wicked to be believed or too good to be believed, but it cannot be too absurd to be believed in this planet of frogs and elephants, of crocodiles and cuttlefish.

For my part, I would have no executions except by the mob; or, at least, by the people acting quite exceptionally. I would make capital punishment impossible except by act of attainder [in which Parliament passes judicial sentence on an accused person as if it were a court of law, thus acting in place of a judge and jury]. Then there would be some chance of a few of our real oppressors getting hanged.

Modern women defend their office with all the fierceness of domesticity. They fight for desk and typewriter as for hearth and home, and develop a sort of wolfish wifeness on behalf of the invisible head of the firm. That is why they do office work so well and that is why they ought not to do it.

In a paradox two opposite cords of truth become entangled in an extricable knot ... but it is this knot which ties safely together the whole bundle of human life... An element of paradox runs through the inmost complications of divinity, in that we cannot conceive that Christ in the wilderness was truly pure, unless we also conceive that he desired to sin.

The heart of paganism is pure sorrow; the heart of Christianity is pure joy. We are joyful because we believe in original sin. It is a source of hope to know that the wrong use of the will may be righted.

Pagan virtues like justice and temperance are the reasonable virtues.... Christian virtues are the unreasonable virtues - virtues like faith, hope, and charity. Faith believes the incredible, or it is no virtue at all; hope hopes against hope, or it is no virtue at all; charity pardons the unpardonable, or it is no virtue at all.

Rights and wrongs exist and are always in collision; it is the same with creeds. And we are all dogmatists. There are two types of dogmatists: those --like me -- who freely admit that they are dogmatists, and those who claim to be tolerant, yet they are the worst bigots of all.

The Catholic Church is the only thing which saves a man from the degrading slavery of being a child of his own age.... It is the only religion that has promised to get rid of my sins.... We don't hang our heads in humiliation; we bow our heads in humility.... I am a free man because I am a Catholic.

Schools are curious places; school is to be endured, not enjoyed. Boyhood is to be enjoyed... The young deserve to be taught the truth, but students are being taught modern subjects like psychology, which is the mind studying itself instead of the truth.

Countless girls stood up in England and shouted, 'I will not be dictated to!' and promptly became stenographers... Emancipation has come to mean little more than exploitation... Emancipators want to destroy the woman, but I want to destroy the tyranny.

How can it be a small thing to be a mother, who is everything to someone, and a large thing to be a bank teller, who is the same thing to everyone?

[Sex] is beautiful, but only with restrictions. It is also dangerous. Without the restrictions of purity, there would be no steps toward true passion.

There are some things not to be argued with intellectually, but to be stamped upon by one's heel. Pornography is one such thing.... The moment sex ceases to be a servant, it instantly becomes a tyrant.

The object of a New Year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul and a new nose; new feet, a new backbone, new ears, and new eyes. Unless a particular man made New Year resolutions, he would make no resolutions.

Unless a man starts afresh about things, he will certainly do nothing effective.

Unless a man starts on the strange assumption that he has never existed before, it is quite certain that he will never exist afterwards.

Unless a man be born again, he shall by no means enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

The things we see every day are the things we never see at all.

The one thing that is never taught by any chance in the atmosphere of public schools is this: that there is a whole truth of things, and that in knowing it and speaking it we are happy.

Failure is the condiment that gives success its flavour.

The pleasure of reading is like the pleasure a cow must have in grazing. There are no rules. You can skip a page, re-read a page and have as many books on the go as you wish.

I believe what really happens in history is this: the old man is always wrong; and the young people are always wrong about what is wrong with him. The practical form it takes is this: that, while the old man may stand by some stupid custom, the young man always attacks it with some theory that turns out to be equally stupid. - ILN 6-3-22

Do not enjoy yourself. Enjoy dances and theaters and joy-rides and champagne and oysters; enjoy jazz and cocktails and night-clubs if you can enjoy nothing better; enjoy bigamy and burglary and any crime in the calendar, in preference to the other alternative; but never learn to enjoy yourself' - The Common Man

It is the final sign of imbecility in a people that it calls cats dogs and describes the sun as the moon--and is very particular about the preciseness of these pseudonyms. To be wrong, and to be carefully wrong, that is the definition of decadence. The disease called aphasia, in which people begin by saying tea when they mean coffee, commonly ends in their silence. Silence of this stiff sort is the chief mark of the powerful parts of modern society. They all seem straining to keep things in rather than to let things out.... Even the newspaper editors and proprietors are more despotic and dangerous by what they do not utter than by what they do. We have all heard the expression "golden silence." The expression "brazen silence" is the only adequate phrase for our editors. If we wake out of this throttled, gaping, and wordless nightmare, we must awake with a yell.

There is only one thing that it requires real courage to say, and that is a truism.

Obey the commandments, defy the conventions.

It is neither blood nor rain that has made England, but hope—the thing all those dead men have desired. France was not France because she was made to be by the skulls of the Celts or by the sun of Gaul. France was France because she chose. (*George Bernard Shaw*)

Nothing is important except the fate of the soul; and literature is only redeemed from an utter triviality, surpassing that of naughts and crosses, by the fact that it describes not the world around us, or the things on the retina of the eye, or the enormous irrelevancy of encyclopaedias, but some condition to which the human spirit can come. (Introduction to *'The Old Curiosity Shop'*)

Now the reason why our fathers did not make marriage, in the middle-aged and static sense, the subject of their plays was a very simple one; it was that a play is a very bad place for discussing that topic. You cannot easily make a good drama out of the success or failure of a marriage, just as you could not make a good drama out of the growth of an oak-tree or the decay of an empire. As Polonius very reasonably observed, it is too long. A happy love-affair will make a drama simply because it is dramatic; it depends on an ultimate yes or no. But a happy marriage is not dramatic; perhaps it would be less happy if it were. The essence of a romantic heroine is that she asks herself an intense question; but the essence of a sensible wife is that she is much too sensible to ask herself any questions at all. All the things that make monogamy a success are in their nature undramatic things, the silent growth of an instinctive confidence, the common wounds and victories, the accumulation of customs, the rich maturing of old jokes. Sane marriage is an untheatrical thing; it is therefore not surprising that most modern dramatists have devoted themselves to insane marriage. (*George Bernard Shaw*)

The only good argument against Christianity is Christians.

We do not need to get good laws to restrain bad people. We need to get good people to restrain bad laws.

The government did not have such power over us when it could send men to the stake, as it does now when it can send them to the elementary school.

Moderate strength is shown in violence, supreme strength is shown in levity. *The Man Who Was Thursday* 239

One can sometimes do good by being the right person in the wrong place.

The modern world is not evil; in some ways the modern world is far too good. It is full of wild and wasted virtues. When a religious scheme is shattered (as Christianity was shattered at the Reformation), is not merely the vices that are let loose. The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad.

Though drinking may be a caprice, it is a caprice that cannot be forbidden to a citizen, but can be forbidden to a slave.

If I set the sun beside the moon,
And if I set the land beside the sea,
And if I set the town beside the country,
And if I set the man beside the woman,
I suppose some fool would talk about one being better.

Love is not blind, it is bound. And the more it is bound, the less it is blind.

True faith has its eye on the unsuccessful; it endures the small human output which is actually exhibited and admired; but it rejoices in the rich and dark treasures of human virtue and valour which have always been neglected. It is even slightly depressed when it thinks of the small good that we have used. But it sings for joy when it thinks of all the good that we have wasted.

Imagination is a thing of clear images, and the more a thing becomes vague the less imaginative it is. Similarly, the more a thing becomes wild and lawless the less imaginative it is. To cook a cutlet in a really new way would be an act of imagination. But there is nothing imaginative about eating a cutlet at the end of a string, or eating it at the top of a tree, or catching it in one's mouth, or consuming it while standing on one leg. Nonsense of this sort is not imaginative for the simple reason that it is infinite. *The Illustrated London News*, 24 March 1906.

Christianity alone has felt that God, to be wholly God, must have been a rebel as well as a king.

There is something odd in the fact that when we reproduce the Middle Ages it is always some such rough and half-grotesque part of them that we reproduce . . . Why is it that we mainly remember the Middle Ages by absurd things? . . . Few modern people know what a mass of illuminating philosophy, delicate metaphysics, clear and dignified social morality exists in the serious scholastic writers of mediaeval times. But we seem to have grasped somehow that the ruder and more clownish elements in the Middle Ages have a human and poetical interest. We are delighted to know about the ignorance of mediaevalism; we are contented to be ignorant about its knowledge. When we talk of something mediaeval, we mean something quaint. We remember that alchemy was mediaeval, or that heraldry was mediaeval. We forget that Parliaments are mediaeval, that all our Universities are mediaeval, that city corporations are mediaeval, that gunpowder and printing are mediaeval, that half the things by which we now live, and to which we look for progress, are mediaeval. "The True Middle Ages," *The Illustrated London News*, 14 July 1906

They call a man a bigot or a slave of dogma, who is a thinker, and has thought thoroughly and to a definite end.

We are learning to do a great many clever things. Unless we are much mistaken the next great task will be to learn not to do them.

Beware of the person who wants to change the world but is uninterested in changing himself.

Without education we are in a horrible and deadly danger of taking educated people seriously.

The whole modern world has divided itself into conservatives and progressives. The business of progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of conservatives is to prevent the mistakes from being corrected.

Hell is God's great compliment to the reality of human freedom and the dignity of human choice.

When a man concludes that any stick is good enough to beat his foe with, that is when he picks up a boomerang.

Joy is "the gigantic secret of God, [the serious business of heaven.](#)"

There is an appropriate parallel between a religion that defies the world and a ritual that defies the weather.

Moderate strength is shown in violence; supreme strength is shown in levity.

Among the rich you will never find a really generous man even by accident. They may give their money away, but they will never give themselves away; they are egotistic, secretive, dry as old bones. To be smart enough to get all that money you must be dull enough to want it. (GKC was actually quite wealthy when he died.)

Man is always something worse or something better than an animal; and a mere argument from animal perfection never touches him at all. Thus, in sex no animal is either chivalrous or obscene. And thus no animal invented anything so bad as drunkenness—or so good as drink.

Modern masters of science are much impressed with the need of beginning all inquiry with a fact. The ancient masters of religion were quite equally impressed with that necessity. They began with the fact of sin — a fact as practical as potatoes. Whether or no man could be washed in miraculous waters, there was no doubt at any rate that he wanted washing. But certain religious leaders in London, not mere materialists, have begun in our

day not to deny the highly disputable water, but to deny the indisputable dirt.

Bowing down in blind credulity, as is my custom, before mere authority and the tradition of the elders, superstitiously swallowing a story I could not test at the time by experiment or private judgment, I am firmly of opinion that I was born on the 29th of May, 1874, on Campden Hill, Kensington....

A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it.

The only defensible war is a war of defense. - Autobiography, 1937

How quickly revolutions grow old; and, worse still, respectable. - The Listener. 3-6-35

There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy.

This is the age in which thin and theoretic minorities can cover and conquer unconscious and untheoretic majorities.

The man who is content to say "We do not want theologians splitting hairs," will doubtless be content to go on and say, "We do not want surgeons splitting filaments more delicate than hairs." It is the fact that many a man would be dead today, if his doctors had not debated the fine shades about doctoring. It is also the fact that European civilization would be dead today, if its doctors of divinity had not debated fine shades about doctrine. - *The Resurrection of Rome*

The free man owns himself. He can damage himself with either eating or drinking; he can ruin himself with gambling. If he does he is certainly a damn fool, and he might possibly be a damned soul; but if he may not, he is not a free man any more than a dog. Broadcast talk 6-11-35

There are two ways of dealing with nonsense in this world. One way is to put nonsense in the right place; as when people put nonsense into nursery rhymes. The other is to put nonsense in the wrong place; as when they put it into educational addresses, psychological criticisms, and complaints against nursery rhymes. — G. K. Chesterton, *Illustrated London News* 10-15-21

"Anyone who is not an anarchist agrees with having a policeman at the corner of the street; but the danger at present is that of finding the policeman half-way down the chimney or even under the bed. (*What I Saw in America*)

Moderns have not the moral courage, as a rule, to avow the sincere spiritual bias behind their fads; they become insincere even about their sincerity. G.K. Chesterton, *Illustrated London News* 12/27/19

Democracy means government by the uneducated, while aristocracy means government by the badly educated. Dean Inge (1860-1954), British churchman and contemporary of Chesterton's, thought that "Democracy is only an experiment in government, and it has the obvious disadvantage of merely counting votes instead of weighing them."

There are two kinds of peacemakers in the modern world; and they are both, though in various ways, a nuisance. The first peacemaker is the man who goes about saying that he agrees with everybody. He confuses everybody. The second peacemaker is the man who goes about saying that everybody agrees with him. He enrages everybody. Between the two of them they produce a hundred times more disputes and distractions than we poor pugnacious people would ever have thought of in our lives. (*Illustrated London News* 3-3-06)

There can be no liberty of thought unless it is ready to unsettle what has recently been settled, as well as what has long been settled. We are perpetually being told in the papers that what is wanted is a strong man who will do things. What is wanted is a strong man who will undo things; and that will be a real test of strength. (*What I Saw in America*, 128)

A stiff apology is a second insult... The injured party does not want to be compensated because he has been wronged; he wants to be healed because he has been hurt.

It is vain indeed to speak of conservatism in this world, except as a convenient party label. Unless we are always changing things for the better, they are always changing themselves for the worse. (*GKC as MC*, 58)

All conservatism is based upon the idea that if you leave things alone you leave them as they are. But you do not. If you leave a thing alone you leave it to a torrent of change.

Men do not ... love beetles or cats or crocodiles with a wholly personal love; they salute them as expressions of that abstract and anonymous energy in nature which to any one is awful, and to an atheist might be frightful.... These ancient and universal tales [of Aesop] are all of animals; as the latest discoveries in the oldest caverns are all of animals. Man, in his simpler state, always felt that he was something too mysterious to be drawn. (*ibid.*, 87, 88-9)

Victorian patriotism “was a sort of unconscious shuffling of an unselfish into a selfish emotion. It was no much that a man was proud of England, as that he was proud of being an Englishman, which is quite a different thing. Being proud of your country is only like being proud of your father or your friend; it is not, in the spiritual and evil sense, really pride at all. But being proud of yourself for being a citizen of that country is really using something else as an excuse for being proud of yourself.” (*ibid.*, 193)

All the things that make monogamy a success are, in their nature, un-dramatic things: the silent growth of an instinctive confidence, the common wounds and victories, the accumulation of customs, the rich maturing of old jokes. *George Bernard Shaw* (London: John Lane, 1909), 191.

[I]n all honest religion there is something that is hateful to the prosperous compromise of our time. You are free, in our time, to say that God does not exist; you are free to say that He exists and is evil; you are free to say (like poor old Renan) that He would like to exist if He could. You may talk of God as a metaphor or a mystification; you may water Him down with gallons of long words, or boil Him to the rags of metaphysics; and it is not merely that nobody punishes, but nobody protests. But, if you speak of God as a fact, as a thing, like a tiger, as a reason for changing one’s conduct, then the modern world will stop you somehow, if it can. We are long past talking about whether an unbeliever should be punished for being irreverent. It is now thought irreverent to be a believer. (*ibid.*, pp. 231-232)

[Shaw] may be mad, but there's method in his madness. There nearly always is method in madness. It's what drives men mad, being methodical.

Chesterton was a large man, standing 6 feet 4 inches tall and weighing more than 300 pounds. His girth gave rise to a famous anecdote. GKC once made this remark to his friend, the influential playwright George Bernard Shaw, who was tall, thin and quite lanky, as well as a vegetarian, teetotaler and non-smoker: “To look at you, Shaw, anyone would think there was a famine in England.” Shaw retorted, “To look at you, Chesterton, anyone would think you caused it.”

There is a road from the eye to heart that does not go through the intellect.

One of the great disadvantages of hurry is that it takes such a long time.

The truth is, of course, that the curtness of the Ten Commandments is an evidence, not of the gloom and narrowness of a religion, but, on the contrary, of its liberality and humanity. It is shorter to state the things forbidden than the things permitted: precisely because most things are permitted, and only a few things are forbidden. (1920)

The world really pays the supreme compliment to the Catholic Church in being intolerant of her tolerating even the appearance of the evils which it tolerates in everything else.

All slang is metaphor, and all metaphor is poetry.

Journalism is a false picture of the world, thrown upon a lighted screen in a darkened room, so that the real world is not seen.

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.

If men will not be governed by the Ten Commandments, they shall be governed by the ten thousand commandments."

Money frees you from doing things you dislike. Since I dislike doing nearly everything, money is handy.

Religious liberty is supposed to mean that everybody is free to discuss religion. But in practice, it means that hardly anybody is allowed to mention it.

Marriage is an adventure, like going to war.

There are no rules of architecture for a castle in the clouds.

Without education we are in a horrible and deadly danger of taking educated people seriously.

Marriage is a duel to the death which no man of honour should decline.

I am ordinary in the correct sense of that term; which means the acceptance of an order, a Creator and the creation, the common sense of gratitude to the Creator for creation; grateful for life and love as gifts permanently good, with marriage as a way to rightly control them.

Hope is the power of being cheerful in circumstances which we know to be desperate.

The thing I hate about an argument is that it always interrupts a discussion.

A study of history shows often that the Spirit of the Age goes wrong and that the Church did not follow. The Church is a mind surviving a hundred moods.

There are two ways to get enough: one is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less.

Men spoke much in my boyhood of restricted or ruined men of genius: and it was common to say that many a man was a Great Might-Have Been. To me it is a more solid and startling fact that any man in the street is a Great Might-Not-Have-Been.

The act of defending any of the cardinal virtues has today all the exhilaration of a vice.

Somehow or other an extraordinary idea has arisen that the disbelievers in miracles consider them coldly and fairly, while believers in miracles accept them only in connection with some dogma. The fact is quite the other way. The believers in miracles accept them (rightly or wrongly) because they have evidence for them. The disbelievers in miracles deny them (rightly or wrongly) because they have a doctrine against them.

Only a live fish can swim against the current, the dead go with it.

Be careful not to be so open-minded that your brains fall out.

Moral issues are always terribly complex for someone without principles.

What an author likes to write most . . . is his signature on the back of a check.

They say travel broadens the mind, but first you must have the mind.

The real trouble with this world of ours is not that it is an unreasonable world, nor even that it is a reasonable one. The commonest kind of trouble is that it is nearly reasonable, but not quite. Life is not an illogicality; yet it is a trap for logicians. It looks just a little more mathematical and regular than it is; its exactitude is obvious, but its inexactitude is hidden; its wildness lies in wait. (*Orthodoxy*)

The state did not assume as much power in sending men to the stake, as it did in sending them to the public elementary school.

Happiness is a mystery, like religion, and should never be rationalised.

If you don't read the newspaper, you are uninformed; if you do read the newspaper, you are misinformed.

Atheism is rather in the lip than in the heart of man.

There is in the last second of time or hair's breadth of space, before the iron leaps to the magnet.

"They do not want regular plenty, but irregular wealth. . . . They want Surprise."

Having the right to do something is not at all the same as being right in doing it.

A man's admiration for absolute government is proportionate to the contempt he feels for those around him.

Modern educators begin by stuffing the child, not with the sense of justice by which he can judge the world, but with the sense of inevitable doom or dedication by which he must accept that particular very worldly aspect of the world.

Truth is sacred; and if you tell the truth too often nobody will believe it.

A stiff apology is a second insult. The injured party does not want to be compensated because he has been

wronged; he wants to be healed because he has been hurt.

We must make up our minds to be ignorant of much, if we would know anything.

The saint is a medicine because he is an antidote. Indeed that is why the saint is often a martyr; he is mistaken for a poison because he is an antidote. He will generally be found restoring the world to sanity by exaggerating whatever the world neglects, which is by no means always the same element in every age. Yet each generation seeks its saint by instinct; and he is not what the people want, but rather what the people need. . . . Therefore it is the paradox of history that each generation is converted by the saint who contradicts it most.

There are two ways to get enough: One is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less.

That which is large enough for the rich to covet is large enough for the poor to defend.

The mere brute pleasure of reading is the sort of pleasure a cow must have in grazing.

Anyone who is not an anarchist agrees with having a policeman at the corner of the street; but the danger at present is that of finding the policeman half-way down the chimney or even under the bed.

There is a false freedom that teaches a man to do what he wants. There is a true freedom that teaches a man to do what he should.

There are two ways to get enough: One is to continue to accumulate more and more. The other is to desire less.

Complaint always comes back in an echo from the ends of the world; but silence strengthens us. *The Father Brown Omnibus*

I could do a great many things before I came to definitely anti-social action like robbing a bank or worse still working in a bank. *Misunderstanding about Method*

The special mark of the modern world is not that it is skeptical, but that it is dogmatic without knowing it. It says, in mockery of old devotees, that they believed without knowing why they believed. . . . But the moderns believe without knowing what they believe — and without even knowing that they do believe it. Their freedom consists in first freely assuming a creed, and then freely forgetting that they are assuming it.

A man with a definite belief always appears bizarre, because he does not change with the world; he has climbed into a fixed star and the earth whizzes below him like a zoetrope. Millions of mild-mannered men call themselves sane and sensible merely because they always catch the fashionable insanity, because they are hurried into madness after madness by the maelstrom of the world. The man with a definite belief is sure to be the truer friend.

I have little doubt that when St. George had killed the dragon he was heartily afraid of the princess.

The modern world will accept no dogmas upon any authority; but it will accept any dogmas on no authority. Say that a thing is so, according to the Pope or the Bible, and it will be dismissed as a superstition without examination. But preface your remark merely with “they say” or “don't you know that?” or try (and fail) to remember the name of some professor mentioned in some newspaper; and the keen rationalism of the

modern mind will accept every word you say.

Philanthropists may be said to love anthropoids.

If the barricades went up in our streets and the poor became masters, I think the priests would escape, I fear the gentlemen would; but I believe the gutters would simply be running with the blood of philanthropists.

“The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.”—Chesterton “Those who hammer their guns into plows will plow for those who do not.”—Thomas Jefferson

I regard golf as an expensive way of playing marbles.

The way to love anything is to realize that it might be lost.

There are two ways of getting home; and one of them is to stay there.

Self-denial is the test and definition of self-government.

When giving treats to friends or children, give them what they like, emphatically not what is good for them.

[Fairy tales] make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water.

You can only find truth with logic if you have already found truth without it.

Stop making your religion a theology and start making it a love affair.

These are the days when the Christian is expected to praise every creed except his own.

The whole truth is generally the ally of virtue; a half-truth is always the ally of some vice.

I believe your own accent is inimitable, though I shall practice it in my bath.

Psychoanalysis is confession without absolution.

Too much capitalism does not mean too many capitalists, but too few capitalists.

Bigotry is an incapacity to conceive seriously the alternative to a proposition.

Though I believe in liberalism, I find it difficult to believe in liberals.

Atheism is the most daring of all dogmas, the assertion of a universal negative.

There are those who hate Christianity and call their hatred an all-embracing love for all religions.

It is generally the man who is not ready to argue, who is ready to sneer.

The test of true religion is that [...] it is always trying to make men feel truths as facts; always trying to make abstract things as plain and solid as concrete things; always trying to make men, not merely admit the truth,

but see, smell, handle, hear, and devour the truth. All great spiritual scriptures are full of the invitation not to test, but to taste; not to examine, but to eat. Their phrases are full of living water and heavenly bread, mysterious manna and dreadful wine. “The Appetite of Earth,” *Alarms and Discursions*, p. 59

When the first transatlantic telephone cable was completed at the turn of the last century, G.K. Chesterton is supposed to have remarked “How ironic that North America and Europe can now communicate endlessly with each other, at the exact historical moment when neither has anything to say.”

America has a genius for the encouragement of fame. (first noticed in the aftermath of Michael Jackson’s death)

I could never see why a man who is not free to open his mouth to drink should be free to open it to talk. Talking does far more direct harm to other people. The village suffers less directly from the village drunkard than it might from the village tale bearer, or the village tub-thumper, or the village villain who seduces the village maiden. These and twenty other types of evil are done simply by talking; it is certain that a vast amount of evil would be prevented if we all wore gags. And the answer is not to deny that slander is a social poison, or seduction a spiritual murder. The answer is that, unless a man is allowed to talk, he might as well be a chimpanzee who is only able to chatter. In other words, if a man loses the responsibility for these rudimentary functions and forms of freedom, he loses not only his citizenship, but his manhood. *Illustrated London News*, July 30, 1921

The whole truth is generally the ally of virtue; a half-truth is always the ally of some vice.

Life is serious all the time, but living cannot be serious all the time.

We've not lost our way, we've lost our address.

How much larger your life would be, if your self could become smaller in it.

Culture is “knowing the best that has been said but also knowing the best that has been done, and even doing our best to do it.” (“The English Peasant,” GKC as MC)

Culture also consists in “the healthy growing of ideas from their own original seed: and if you don’t like that, you don’t like civilization. Also, it does not like you.” (*Illustrated London News*, Nov. 9, 1912)

Men invent new ideals because they dare not attempt old ideals. They look forward with enthusiasm, because they are afraid to look back.

The promise of progress is only that things will get better—they will never be best.

Falsehood is never so false as when it is very nearly true.

In the last analysis, the reason why I am a Christian is that the Church is living and not a dead teacher.

Children are innocent and love justice, while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy. I do not deny that women have been wronged and even tortured; but I doubt if they were ever tortured so much as they are tortured now by the absurd modern attempt to make them domestic empresses and competitive clerks at the same time.

Theological distinctions are fine but not thin. In all the mess of modern thoughtlessness, that still calls itself modern thought, there is perhaps nothing so stupendously stupid as the common saying, "Religion can never depend on minute disputes about doctrine." It is like saying that life can never depend on minute disputes about medicine.

We are perhaps permitted tragedy as a sort of merciful comedy because the frantic energy of divine things would knock us down ... (*Orthodoxy*)

All healthy men, ancient and modern, Western and Eastern, hold that there is in sex a fury that we cannot afford to inflame; and that a certain mystery must attach to the instinct if it is to continue delicate and sane. (*The Common Man*)

Philosophy is not the concern of those who pass through Divinity and Greats, but of those who pass through birth and death. Nearly all the more awful and abstruse statements can be put in words of one syllable, from 'A child is born' to 'A soul is damned.' If the ordinary man may not discuss existence, why should he be asked to conduct it? "The Philosopher: George Bernard Shaw" (1910)