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Heretics

By

Gilbert K. Chesterton

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The Author

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was born in London, England on the 29th of May, 1874. Though he considered himself a mere "rollicking journalist," he was actually a prolific and gifted writer in virtually every area of literature. A man of strong opinions and enormously talented at defending them, his exuberant personality nevertheless allowed him to maintain warm friendships with people--such as George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells--with whom he vehemently disagreed.

Chesterton had no difficulty standing up for what he believed. He was one of the few journalists to oppose the Boer War. His 1922 "Eugenics and Other Evils" attacked what was at that time the most progressive of all ideas, the idea that the human race could and should breed a superior version of itself. In the Nazi experience, history demonstrated the wisdom of his once "reactionary" views.

His poetry runs the gamut from the comic 1908 "On Running After One's Hat" to dark and serious ballads. During the dark days of 1940, when Britain stood virtually alone against the armed might of Nazi Germany, these lines from his 1911 Ballad of the White Horse were often quoted:

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

Though not written for a scholarly audience, his biographies of authors and historical figures like Charles Dickens and St. Francis of Assisi often contain brilliant insights into their subjects. His Father Brown mystery stories, written between 1911 and 1936, are still being read and adapted for television.

His politics fitted with his deep distrust of concentrated wealth and power of any sort. Along with his friend Hilaire Belloc and in books like the 1910 "What's Wrong with the World" he advocated a view called "Distributionism" that was best summed up by his expression that every man ought to be allowed to own "three acres and a cow." Though not known as a political thinker, his political influence has circled the world. Some see in him the father of the "small is beautiful" movement and a newspaper article by him is credited with provoking Gandhi to seek a "genuine" nationalism for India rather than one that imitated the British.

Heretics belongs to yet another area of literature at which Chesterton excelled. A fun-loving and gregarious man, he was nevertheless troubled in his adolescence by thoughts of suicide. In Christianity he found the answers to the dilemmas and paradoxes he saw in life. Other books in that same series include his 1908

Orthodoxy (written in response to attacks on this book) and his 1925 The Everlasting Man. Orthodoxy is also available as electronic text.

Chesterton died on the 14th of June, 1936 in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, England. During his life he published 69 books and at least another ten based on his writings have been published after his death. Many of those books are still in print. Ignatius Press is systematically publishing his collected writings.