

## **INTRODUCTION**

In certain endless uplands, uplands like great flats gone dizzy, slopes that seem to contradict the idea that there is even such a thing as a level, and make us all realize that we live on a planet with a sloping roof, you will come from time to time upon whole valleys filled with loose rocks and boulders, so big as to be like mountains broken loose. The whole might be an experimental creation shattered and cast away. It is often difficult to believe that such cosmic refuse can have come together except by human means. The mildest and most cockney imagination conceives the place to be the scene of some war of giants. To me it is always associated with one idea, recurrent and at last instinctive. The scene was the scene of the stoning of some prehistoric prophet, a prophet as much more gigantic than after-prophets as the boulders are more gigantic than the pebbles. He spoke some words--words that seemed shameful and tremendous--and the world, in terror, buried him under a wilderness of stones. The place is the monument of an ancient fear.

If we followed the same mood of fancy, it would be more difficult to imagine what awful hint or wild picture of the universe called forth that primal persecution, what secret of sensational thought lies buried under the brutal stones. For in our time the blasphemies are threadbare. Pessimism is now patently, as it always was essentially, more commonplace than piety. Profanity is now more than an affectation--it is a convention. The curse against God is Exercise I. in the primer of minor poetry. It was not, assuredly, for such babyish solemnities that our imaginary prophet was stoned in the morning of the world. If we weigh the matter in the faultless scales of imagination, if we see what is the real trend of humanity, we shall feel it most probable that he was stoned for saying that the grass was green and that the birds sang in spring; for the mission of all the prophets from the beginning has not been so much the pointing out of heavens or hells as primarily the pointing out of the earth.

Religion has had to provide that longest and strangest telescope--the telescope through which we could see the star upon which we dwelt. For the mind and eyes of the average man this world is as lost as Eden and as sunken as Atlantis. There runs a strange law through the length of human history--that men are continually tending to undervalue their environment, to undervalue their happiness, to undervalue themselves. The great sin of mankind, the sin typified by the fall of Adam, is the tendency, not towards pride, but towards this weird and horrible humility.

This is the great fall, the fall by which the fish forgets the sea, the ox forgets the

meadow, the clerk forgets the city, every man forgets his environment and, in the fullest and most literal sense, forgets himself. This is the real fall of Adam, and it is a spiritual fall. It is a strange thing that many truly spiritual men, such as General Gordon, have actually spent some hours in speculating upon the precise location of the Garden of Eden. Most probably we are in Eden still. It is only our eyes that have changed.

The pessimist is commonly spoken of as the man in revolt. He is not. Firstly, because it requires some cheerfulness to continue in revolt, and secondly, because pessimism appeals to the weaker side of everybody, and the pessimist, therefore, drives as roaring a trade as the publican. The person who is really in revolt is the optimist, who generally lives and dies in a desperate and suicidal effort to persuade all the other people how good they are. It has been proved a hundred times over that if you really wish to enrage people and make them angry, even unto death, the right way to do it is to tell them that they are all the sons of God. Jesus Christ was crucified, it may be remembered, not because of anything he said about God, but on a charge of saying that a man could in three days pull down and rebuild the Temple. Every one of the great revolutionists, from Isaiah to Shelley, have been optimists. They have been indignant, not about the badness of existence, but about the slowness of men in realizing its goodness. The prophet who is stoned is not a brawler or a marplot. He is simply a rejected lover. He suffers from an unrequited attachment to things in general.

It becomes increasingly apparent, therefore, that the world is in a permanent danger of being misjudged. That this is no fanciful or mystical idea may be tested by simple examples. The two absolutely basic words 'good' and 'bad,' descriptive of two primal and inexplicable sensations, are not, and never have been, used properly. Things that are bad are not called good by any people who experience them; but things that are good are called bad by the universal verdict of humanity.

Let me explain a little: Certain things are bad so far as they go, such as pain, and no one, not even a lunatic, calls a tooth-ache good in itself; but a knife which cuts clumsily and with difficulty is called a bad knife, which it certainly is not. It is only not so good as other knives to which men have grown accustomed. A knife is never bad except on such rare occasions as that in which it is neatly and scientifically planted in the middle of one's back. The coarsest and bluntest knife which ever broke a pencil into pieces instead of sharpening it is a good thing in so far as it is a knife. It would have appeared a miracle in the Stone Age. What we call a bad knife is a good knife not good enough for us; what we call a bad hat is a good hat not good enough for us; what we call bad cookery is good cookery not good enough for us; what we call a bad civilization is a good civilization not good enough for us. We choose to call the great mass of the history of mankind bad,

not because it is bad, but because we are better. This is palpably an unfair principle. Ivory may not be so white as snow, but the whole Arctic continent does not make ivory black.

Now it has appeared to me unfair that humanity should be engaged perpetually in calling all those things bad which have been good enough to make other things better, in everlastingly kicking down the ladder by which it has climbed. It has appeared to me that progress should be something else besides a continual parricide; therefore I have investigated the dust-heaps of humanity, and found a treasure in all of them. I have found that humanity is not incidentally engaged, but eternally and systematically engaged, in throwing gold into the gutter and diamonds into the sea. I have found that every man is disposed to call the green leaf of the tree a little less green than it is, and the snow of Christmas a little less white than it is; therefore I have imagined that the main business of a man, however humble, is defence. I have conceived that a defendant is chiefly required when worldlings despise the world--that a counsel for the defence would not have been out of place in that terrible day when the sun was darkened over Calvary and Man was rejected of men.