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G. K. Chesterton

The Man Who Was Thursday

英国文学



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NOTE

title-page. In my case, it is true, it was a question of a subtitle rather than a title. The book was called *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*. It was not intended to describe the real world as it was, or as I thought it was, even when my thoughts were considerably less settled than they are now. It was intended to describe the world of wild doubt and despair which the pessimists were generally describing at that date; with just a gleam of hope in some double meaning of the doubt, which even the pessimists felt in some fitful fashion.



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THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

G. K. Chesterton was born in 1874, and educated at St Paul's School, where, despite his efforts to achieve honourable oblivion at the bottom of his class, he was singled out as a boy with distinct literary promise. He decided to follow art as a career, and studied at the Slade School, where, while 'attending or not attending to his studies', he met Ernest Hodder-Williams, who formed the fixed notion that Chesterton could write. At his request he reviewed a number of books for the *Bookman* and found himself launched on a profession he was to follow all his life. Probably his most famous stories are those of 'Father Brown', but he wrote much about every conceivable subject under or beyond the sun. The best accounts of his life are to be found in his own *Autobiography*, published soon after his death in 1936, and in Miss Maisie Ward's *Life* of him. Many of his books have been published in Penguins.





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THE MAN
WHO WAS THURSDAY

A NIGHTMARE

G. K. CHESTERTON 英国文学



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To

EDMUND CLERIHEW BENTLEY

A cloud was on the mind of men
And wailing went the weather,
Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul
When we were boys together.
Science announced nonentity
And art admired decay;
The world was old and ended:
But you and I were gay;
Round us in antic order
Crippled vices came –
Lust that had lost its laughter,
Fear that had lost its shame.
Like the white lock of Whistler,
That lit our aimless gloom,
Men showed their own white feather
As proudly as a plume.
Life was a fly that faded,
And death a drone that stung;
The world was very old indeed
When you and I were young.
They twisted even decent sin
To shapes not to be named:
Men were ashamed of honour;
But we were not ashamed.
Weak if we were and foolish,
Not thus we failed, not thus;
When that black Baal blocked the heavens
He had no hymns from us.
Children we were – our forts of sand
Were even as weak as we,
High as they went we piled them up
To break that bitter sea.
Fools as we were in motley,
All jangling and absurd,

DEDICATION

When all church bells were silent
Our cap and bells were heard.

Not all unhelped we held the fort,
Our tiny flags unfurled;
Some giants laboured in that cloud
To lift it from the world.
I find again the book we found,
I feel the hour that flings
Far out of fish-shaped Paumanok
Some cry of cleaner things;
And the Green Carnation withered,
As in forest fires that pass,
Roared in the wind of all the world
Ten million leaves of grass;
Or sane and sweet and sudden as
A bird sings in the rain –
Truth out of Tusitala spoke
And pleasure out of pain.
Yes, cool and clear and sudden as
A bird sings in the grey,
Dunedin to Samoa spoke,
And darkness unto day.
But we were young; we lived to see
God break their bitter charms,
God and the good Republic
Come riding back in arms:
We have seen the City of Mansoul,
Even as it rocked, relieved –
Blessed are they who did not see,
But, being blind, believed.

This is a tale of those old fears,
Even of those emptied hells,
And none but you shall understand
The true thing that it tells –
Of what colossal gods of shame
Could cow men and yet crash
Of what huge devils hid the stars,
Yet fell at a pistol flash.

DEDICATION

The doubts that were so plain to chase,
So dreadful to withstand –
Oh, who shall understand but you;
Yes, who shall understand?
The doubts that drove us through the night
As we two talked amain,
And day had broken on the streets
Ere it broke upon the brain.
Between us, by the peace of God,
Such truth can now be told;
Yes, there is strength in striking root,
And good in growing old.
We have found common things at last,
And marriage and a creed,
And I may safely write it now,
And you may safely read.

G. K. C.

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CHAPTER I

The Two Poets of Saffron Park

THE suburb of Saffron Park lay on the sunset side of London, as red and ragged as a cloud of sunset. It was built of a bright brick throughout; its skyline was fantastic, and even its ground plan was wild. It had been the outburst of a speculative builder, faintly tinged with art, who called its architecture sometimes Elizabethan and sometimes Queen Anne, apparently under the impression that the two sovereigns were identical. It was described with some justice as an artistic colony, though it never in any definable way produced any art. But although its pretensions to be an intellectual centre were a little vague, its pretensions to be a pleasant place were quite indisputable. The stranger who looked for the first time at the quaint red houses could only think how very oddly shaped the people must be who could fit in to them. Nor when he met the people was he disappointed in this respect. The place was not only pleasant, but perfect, if once he could regard it not as a deception but rather as a dream. Even if the people were not 'artists', the whole was nevertheless artistic. That young man with the long, auburn hair and the impudent face – that young man was not really a poet; but surely he was a poem. That old gentleman with the wild, white beard and the wild, white hat – that venerable humbug was not really a philosopher; but at least he was the cause of philosophy in others. That scientific gentleman with the bald, egg-like head and the bare, bird-like neck had no real right to the airs of science that he assumed. He had not discovered anything new in biology; but what biological creature could he have discovered more singular than himself? Thus, and thus only, the whole place had properly to be regarded; it had to be considered not so much as a workshop for artists, but as a frail but finished work of

THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

art. A man who stepped into its social atmosphere felt as if he had stepped into a written comedy.

More especially this attractive unreality fell upon it about nightfall, when the extravagant roofs were dark against the afterglow and the whole insane village seemed as separate as a drifting cloud. This again was more strongly true of the many nights of local festivity, when the little gardens were often illuminated, and the big Chinese lanterns glowed in the dwarfish trees like some fierce and monstrous fruit. And this was strongest of all on one particular evening, still vaguely remembered in the locality, of which the auburn-haired poet was the hero. It was not by any means the only evening of which he was the hero. On many nights those passing by his little back garden might hear his high, didactic voice laying down the law to men and particularly to women. The attitude of women in such cases was indeed one of the paradoxes of the place. Most of the women were of the kind vaguely called emancipated, and professed some protest against male supremacy. Yet these new women would always pay to a man the extravagant compliment which no ordinary woman ever pays to him, that of listening while he is talking. And Mr Lucian Gregory, the red-haired poet, was really (in some sense) a man worth listening to, even if one laughed at the end of it. He put the old cant of the lawlessness of art and the art of lawlessness with a certain impudent freshness which gave at least a momentary pleasure. He was helped in some degree by the arresting oddity of his appearance, which he worked, as the phrase goes, for all it was worth. His dark red hair parted in the middle was literally like a woman's, and curved into the slow curls of a virgin in a pre-Raphaelite picture. From within this almost saintly oval, however, his face projected suddenly broad and brutal, the chin carried forward with a look of cockney contempt. This combination at once tickled and terrified the nerves of a neurotic population. He seemed like a walking blasphemy, a blend of the angel and the ape.