

G. K. Chesterton From Wikiquote

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (May 29, 1874 - June 14, 1936) English writer

*These have been arranged **chronologically** where a date of publication is known*

- . **Impartiality is a pompous name for indifference, which is an elegant name for ignorance.**
- o. *The Speaker* (15 December 1900)
- o. The act of defending any of the cardinal virtues has today all the exhilaration of a vice.
- o. A Defence of Humilities, *The Defendant* (1901)
- o. **There is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect.** Men do not quarrel about the meaning of sunsets; they never dispute that the hawthorn says the best and wittiest thing about the spring.
- o. A Defence of Heraldry, *The Defendant* (1901)
- o. The one stream of poetry which is continually flowing is slang.
- o. *The Defendant* (1901)
- o. One of the deepest and strangest of all human moods is the mood which will suddenly strike us perhaps in a garden at night, or deep in sloping meadows, the feeling that every flower and leaf has just uttered something stupendously direct and important, and that we have by a prodigy of imbecility not heard or understood it. **There is a certain poetic value, and that a genuine one, in this sense of having missed the full meaning of things. There is beauty, not only in wisdom, but in this dazed and dramatic ignorance.**
- o. Source: the biography *Robert Browning*. (1903)
- o. The truth is that Tolstoy, with his immense genius, with his colossal faith, with his vast fearlessness and vast knowledge of life, is deficient in one faculty and one faculty alone. He is not a mystic; and therefore he has a tendency to go mad. Men talk of the extravagances and frenzies that have been produced by mysticism; they are a mere drop in the bucket. In the main, and from the beginning of time, mysticism has kept men sane. The thing that has driven them mad was logic. ...**The only thing that has kept the race of men from the mad extremes of the convent and the pirate-galley, the night-club and the lethal chamber, has been mysticism— the belief that logic is misleading, and that things are not what they seem.**
- o. *Tolstoy* (1903)
- o. Reason is always a kind of brute force; those who appeal to the head rather than the heart, however pallid and polite, are necessarily men of violence. We speak of 'touching' a man's heart, but we can do nothing to his head but hit it.
- o. *Twelve Types* (1903) Charles II
- o. Good taste, the last and vilest of human superstitions, has succeeded in silencing us where all the rest have failed.
- o. *Heretics* (1905)
- o. The word 'heresy' not only means no longer being wrong; it practically means being clear-headed and courageous. The word 'orthodoxy' not only no longer means being right; it practically means being wrong. All this can mean one thing, and one thing only. It means that people care less for whether they are philosophically right.
- o. *Heretics* (1905)
- o. The rolling stone rolls echoing from rock to rock; but the rolling stone is dead. The moss is silent because the moss is alive.

- o. *Heretics* (1905)
- o. Carlyle said that men were mostly fools. Christianity, with a surer and more reverent realism, says that they are all fools. This doctrine is sometimes called the doctrine of original sin. It may also be described as the doctrine of the equality of men.
- o. *Heretics* (1905)
- o. Man can hardly be defined ... as an animal who makes tools; ants and beavers and many other animals make tools, in the sense that they make an apparatus. Man can be defined as an animal that makes dogmas.
- o. *Heretics* (1905)
- o. There are no wise few. Every aristocracy that has ever existed has behaved, in all essential points, exactly like a small mob.
- o. *Heretics* (1905)
- o. "Bosh," he said, "On what else is the whole world run but immediate impressions? What is more practical? My friend, the philosophy of this world may be founded on facts, but its business is run on spiritual impressions and atmospheres."
- o. *The Painful Fall of a Great Reputation from The Club of Queer Trades* (1905)
- o. **There is a great man who makes every man feel small. But the real great man is the man who makes every man feel great.**
- o. *Charles Dickens* (1906)
- o. "An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered; an adventure is an inconvenience rightly considered."
- o. On Running After Ones Hat, All Things Considered, 1908
- o. If you'd take your head home and boil it for a turnip it might be useful. I can't say. But it might.
- o. *The Man Who was Thursday* (1908)
- o. **Moderate strength is shown in violence, supreme strength is shown in levity.**
- o. *The Man Who was Thursday* (1908)
- o. And it is always the humble man who talks too much; the proud man watches himself too closely.
- o. *The Man Who was Thursday* (1908)
- o. For fear of the newspapers politicians are dull, and at last they are too dull even for the newspapers.
- o. *All Things Considered* (1908)
- o. When learned men begin to use their reason, then I generally discover that they haven't got any.
- o. *Illustrated London News* (11-7-1908)
- o. A man must be orthodox upon most things, or he will never even have time to preach his own heresy.
- o. *George Bernard Shaw* (1909)
- o. Misers get up early in the morning; and burglars, I am informed, get up the night before.
- o. *Tremendous Trifles* (1909)
- o. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon.
- o. *Tremendous Trifles* (1909)
- o. Men do not differ much about what things they will call evils; they differ enormously about what evils they will call excusable.

- o. *Illustrated London News* (10/23/1909)
- o. The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies; probably because they are generally the same people.
- o. *Illustrated London News* (7/16/1910)
- o. Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese.
- o. *Alarms and Discursions* (1910)
- o. The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.
- o. *What's Wrong With The World* (1910)
- o. "I swear to you, then," said MacIan, after a pause. "I swear to you that nothing shall come between us. I swear to you that nothing shall be in my heart or in my head till our swords clash together. I swear it by the God you have denied, by the Blessed Lady you have blasphemed; I swear it by the seven swords in her heart. I swear it by the Holy Island where my fathers are, by the honour of my mother, by the secret of my people, and by the chalice of the Blood of God." The atheist drew up his head. "And I," he said, "give my word."
- o. *The Ball and the Cross* (1909), part II: "The Religion of the Stipendiary Magistrate", last paragraphs
- o. It is the one great weakness of journalism as a picture of our modern existence, that it must be a picture made up entirely of exceptions. We announce on flaring posters that a man has fallen off a scaffolding. We do not announce on flaring posters that a man has not fallen off a scaffolding. Yet this latter fact is fundamentally more exciting, as indicating that that moving tower of terror and mystery, a man, is still abroad upon the earth. That the man has not fallen off a scaffolding is really more sensational; and it is also some thousand times more common. But journalism cannot reasonably be expected thus to insist upon the permanent miracles. Busy editors cannot be expected to put on their posters, "Mr. Wilkinson Still Safe," or "Mr. Jones, of Worthing, Not Dead Yet." They cannot announce the happiness of mankind at all. They cannot describe all the forks that are not stolen, or all the marriages that are not judiciously dissolved. Hence the complex picture they give of life is of necessity fallacious; they can only represent what is unusual. However democratic they may be, they are only concerned with the minority.
- o. *The Ball and the Cross*, part IV: "A Discussion at Dawn", 2nd paragraph
- o. As for science and religion, the known and admitted facts are few and plain enough. All that the parsons say is unproved. All that the doctors say is disproved. That's the only difference between science and religion there's ever been, or will be.
- o. Michael Moon in *Manalive* (1912)
- o. The academic mind reflects infinity, and is full of light by the simple process of being shallow and standing still.
- o. Inglewood in *Manalive* (1912)
- o. The rich are the scum of the earth in every country.
- o. *The Flying Inn* (1914)
- o. To have a right to do a thing is not at all the same as to be right in doing it.
- o. *A Short History of England* (1917)
- o. All government is an ugly necessity.
- o. *A Short History of England* (1917)
- o. When a politician is in opposition he is an expert on the means to some end; and when he is in office he is an expert on the

obstacles to it.

- o. *Illustrated London News* (4/6/1918)
- o. It is terrible to contemplate how few politicians are hanged.
- o. *The Cleveland Press* (3/1/1921)
- o. 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 or other normal amusements of mankind.
- o. *Child Psychology and Nonsense* (October 15, 1921)
- o. "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."
- o. ILN 6-3-1922
- o. If there were no God, there would be no atheists.
- o. *Where All Roads Lead* (1922)
- o. The whole modern world has divided itself into Conservatives and Progressives. The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of the Conservatives is to prevent the mistakes from being corrected."
- o. ILN, 4/19/24
- o. A dead thing can go with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it.
- o. *The Everlasting Man* (1925)
- o. It is exactly when we do see how queer the quadruped is that we praise the man who mounts him; and exactly when we do see how queer the biped is that we praise the Providence that made him.
- o. *The Everlasting Man* (1925)
- o. Art is the signature of man.
- o. *The Everlasting Man* (1925)
- o. These are the days when the Christian is expected to praise every creed except his own.
- o. *Illustrated London News* (8-11-1928)
- o. Fallacies do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions.
- o. *Illustrated London News* (4/19/1930)
- o. Plato was right, but not quite right.
- o. *The Dumb Ox* (1934)
- o. The modern world seems to have no notion of preserving different things side by side, of allowing its proper and proportionate place to each, of saving the whole varied heritage of culture. It has no notion except that of simplifying something by destroying nearly everything.
- o. *On Love*
- o. It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem.
- o. *The Point of a Pin*

- "A change of opinions is almost unknown in an elderly military man."
 - A Utopia of Usurers, CW, V, p396
 - "What embitters the world is not excess of criticism, but an absence of self-criticism."
 - Sidelights on New London and Newer New York
 - "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."
 - A Miscellany of Men
 - "The simplification of anything is always sensational."
 - Varied Types
 - "The center of every man's existence is a dream. Death, disease, insanity, are merely material accidents, like a toothache or a twisted ankle. That these brutal forces always besiege and often capture the citadel does not prove that they are the citadel."
 - "Sir Walter Scott," Twelve Types
 - "The person who is really in revolt is the optimist, who generally lives and dies in a desperate and suicidal effort to persuade other people how good they are."
 - Introduction to The Defendant

Orthodoxy (1909)

- The materialist philosophy (whether true or not) is certainly much more limiting than any religion. In one sense, of course, all intelligent ideas are narrow. They cannot be broader than themselves. A Christian is only restricted in the same sense that an atheist is restricted. He cannot think Christianity false and continue to be a Christian; and the atheist cannot think atheism false and continue to be an atheist.
- There is a very special sense in which materialism has more restrictions than spiritualism. Mr. McCabe thinks me a slave because I am not allowed to believe in determinism. I think Mr. McCabe a slave because he is not allowed to believe in fairies. But if we examine the two vetoes we shall see that his is really much more of a pure veto than mine. The Christian is quite free to believe that there is a considerable amount of settled order and inevitable development in the universe. But the materialist is not allowed to admit into his spotless machine the slightest speck of spiritualism or miracle. Poor Mr. McCabe is not allowed to retain even the tiniest imp, though it might be hiding in a pimpernel.
- The sane man knows that he has a touch of the beast, a touch of the devil, a touch of the saint, a touch of the citizen. Nay, the really sane man knows that he has a touch of the madman. But the materialist's world is quite simple and solid, just as the madman is quite sure he is sane.
- Materialists and madmen never have doubts.
- Spiritual doctrines do not actually limit the mind as do materialistic denials. Even if I believe in immortality I need not think about it. But if I disbelieve in immortality I must not think about it. In the first case the road is open and I can go as far as I like; in the second the road is shut.
- Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly.

- o. 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), it is not merely the vices that are let loose. The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues are let loose also; and the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone. Thus some scientists care for truth; and their truth is pitiless. Thus some humanitarians only care for pity; and their pity (I am sorry to say) is often untruthful.
- o. Fairyland is nothing but the sunny country of common sense.
- o. 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.
- o. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums.

The "Father Brown" Mystery Series

[The Complete Father Brown Series online](#)

- . To be clever enough to get all that money, one must be stupid enough to want it.
- o. *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911) The Paradise of Thieves
- o. Journalism largely consists in saying 'Lord Jones Dead' to people who never knew Lord Jones was alive.
- o. *The Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914) The Purple Wig
- o. An artist will betray himself by some sort of sincerity.
- o. *The Incredulity of Father Brown* (1926) The Dagger with Wings
- o. If you convey to a woman that something ought to be done, there is always a dreadful danger that she will suddenly do it.
- o. *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927) The Song of the Flying Fish

The Dagger with Wings (1926)

- o. You have no business to be an unbeliever. You ought to stand for all the things these stupid people call superstitions. Come now, don't you think there's a lot in those old wives' tales about luck and charms and so on, silver bullets included? What do you say about them as a Catholic?' 'I say I'm an agnostic,' replied Father Brown, smiling. 'Nonsense,' said Aylmer impatiently. 'It's your business to believe things.' **'Well, I do believe some things, of course,' conceded Father Brown; 'and therefore, of course, I don't believe other things.'**
- o. 'You do believe it,' he said. 'You do believe everything. We all believe everything, even when we deny everything. The deniers believe. The unbelievers believe. Don't you feel in your heart that these contradictions do not really contradict: that there is a cosmos that contains them all? The soul goes round upon a wheel of stars and all things return; perhaps Strake and I have striven in many shapes, beast against beast and bird against bird, and perhaps we shall strive for ever. But since we seek and need each other, even that eternal hatred is an eternal love. Good and evil go round in a wheel that is one thing and not many. Do you not realize in your heart, do you not believe behind all your beliefs, that there is but one reality and we are its shadows; and that all things are but aspects of one thing: a centre where men melt into Man and Man into God?' 'No,' said Father Brown.

- o. He had the notion that because I am a clergyman I should believe anything. Many people have little notions of that kind.
- o. **All things are from God; and above all, reason and imagination and the great gifts of the mind. They are good in themselves; and we must not altogether forget their origin even in their perversion.**
- o. 'I'm afraid I'm a practical man,' said the doctor with gruff humour, 'and I don't bother much about religion and philosophy.' 'You'll never be a practical man till you do,' said Father Brown. **'Look here, doctor; you know me pretty well; I think you know I'm not a bigot. You know I know there are all sorts in all religions; good men in bad ones and bad men in good ones.'**
- o. Yet he is right enough about there being a white magic, if he only knows where to look for it.

The Ballad of the White Horse (1911)

See [The Ballad of the White Horse](#) for more quotes from this work.

- . *I tell you naught for your comfort, Yea, naught for your desire, Save that the sky grows darker yet And the sea rises higher.*
- o. *The great Gaels of Ireland Are the men that God made mad, For all their wars are merry, And all their songs are sad.*

A Song of Defeat

- o. **Our chiefs said 'Done,' and I did not deem it; Our seers said 'Peace,' and it was not peace; Earth will grow worse till men redeem it, And wars more evil, ere all wars cease.**
- o. For we that fight till the world is free, We are not easy in victory: We have known each other too long, my brother, And fought each other, the world and we.
- o. **It is all as of old, the empty clangour, The NOTHING scrawled on a five-foot page, The huckster who, mocking holy anger, Painfully paints his face with rage.** ... We that fight till the world is free, We have no comfort in victory; We have read each other as Cain his brother, **We know each other, these slaves and we.**

The Great Minimum

- o. In a time of sceptic moths and cynic rusts, And fattened lives that of their sweetness tire In a world of flying loves and fading lusts, It is something to be sure of a desire. Lo, blessed are our ears for they have heard; Yea, blessed are our eyes for they have seen: Let the thunder break on man and beast and bird And the lightning. **It is something to have been.**
- o. It is something to have wept as we have wept, It is something to have done as we have done, It is something to have watched when all men slept, And seen the stars which never see the sun. It is something to have smelt the mystic rose, Although it break and leave the thorny rods, It is something to have hungered once as those Must hunger who have ate the bread of gods.
- o. To have seen you and your unforgotten face, Brave as a blast of trumpets for the fray, Pure as white lilies in a watery space, It were something, though you went from me today. **To have known the things that from the weak are furled, Perilous ancient passions, strange and high; It is something to be wiser than the world, It is something to be older than the sky.**

Who Goes Home?

- o. In the city built upon slime and loam, They cry in their Parliament, "Who goes home?" And there comes no answer in arch

or dome, For none in the city of graves goes home. Yet these shall perish and understand, For God has pity on this great land.

- o. Men that are men again: Who goes home? Tocsin and trumpeter! Who goes home? For there's blood on the grass and blood on the foam, And blood on the body, when Man comes home. **And a voice valedictory: Who is for victory? Who is for liberty? Who goes home?**
- o. **Attributed**
- o. Poets do not go mad; but chess players do. Mathematicians go mad, and cashiers; but creative artists very seldom. I am not, as will be seen, in any sense attacking logic: I only say that this danger does lie in logic, not in imagination.
- o. A good novel tells us the truth about its hero; but a bad novel tells us the truth about its author. --- this is from "Heretics" Chapter XV "On Smart Novelists and the Smart Set" (1905).
- o. A man looking at a hippopotamus may sometimes be tempted to regard a hippopotamus as an enormous mistake; but he is also bound to confess that a fortunate inferiority prevents him personally from making such mistakes. --- from "Charles Dickens", Part 2 Chapter X "The Great Dickens Characters" (1906)
- o. **A man's opinion on tramcars matters; his opinion on Botticelli matters; his opinion on all things does not matter.** from "Heretics", Chapter I "Introductory Remarks on the Importance of Orthodoxy" (1905)
- o. **A sober man may become a drunkard through being a coward. A brave man may become a coward through being a drunkard.** from "Charles Dickens", Part 2 Chapter VIII "The Time of Transition" (1906)
- o. America has a new delicacy, a coarse, rank refinement.--- from "Charles Dickens", Part 1 Chapter VI "Dickens and America" (1906)
- o. As enunciated today, 'progress' is simply a comparative of which we have not settled the superlative. --- from "Heretics" Chapter II "On the Negative Spirit" (1905)
- o. **Charity is the power of defending that which we know to be indefensible. Hope is the power of being cheerful in circumstances which we know to be desperate.** --- from rom "Heretics" Chapter XII "Paganism and Mr. Lowes Dickinson" (1905)
- o. Don't ever take a fence down until you know the reason why it was put up.
- o. Either criticism is no good at all (a very defensible position) or else criticism means saying about an author the very things that would have made him jump of his boots. --- from "Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens" Chapter VI "Old Curiosity Shop" (1911)
- o. Every man speaks of public opinion, and means by public opinion, public opinion minus his opinion. --- from "Heretics" Chapter VIII "The Mildness of the Yellow Press" (1905)
- o. Happiness is a mystery like religion, and should never be rationalised. --- from "Heretics" Chapter VII "Omar and the Sacred Vine" (1905)
- o. He is a very shallow critic who cannot see an eternal rebel in the heart of a conservative.
- o. Honour is a luxury for aristocrats, but it is a necessity for hall-porters. --- from "Heretics", Chapter XIII "Celts and Celtophiles" (1905)
- o. If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly. --- from "What's Wrong With the World", Chapter XIV "Folly and Female Education" (1910)

- o. Many clever men like you have trusted to civilisation. Many clever Babylonians, many clever Egyptians, many clever men at the end of Rome. Can you tell me, in a world that is flagrant with the failures of civilisation, what there is particularly immortal about yours?
- o. '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'. --- from "The Defendant", "A Defence of Patriotism" (1901)
- o. **Never invoke the gods unless you really want them to appear. It annoys them very much.**
- o. Science in the modern world has many uses; its chief use, however, is to provide long words to cover the errors of the rich. The word 'kleptomania' is a vulgar example of what I mean. -- "Heretics", Chapter XIII "Celts and Celtophiles" (1905)
- o. The oligarchic character of the modern English commonwealth does not rest, like many oligarchies, on the cruelty of the rich to the poor. It does not even rest on the kindness of the rich to the poor. It rests on the perennial and unflinching kindness of the poor to the rich.
- o. **There is no such thing on earth as an uninteresting subject; the only thing that can exist is an uninterested person.** --- from "Heretics", Chapter III "On Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Making the World Small" (1905)
- o. **There is something to be said for every error; but, whatever may be said for it, the most important thing to be said about it is that it is erroneous.**
- o. Thrift is the really romantic thing; economy is more romantic than extravagance...thrift is poetic because it is creative; waste is unpoetic because it is waste...if a man could undertake to make use of all the things in his dustbin, he would be a broader genius than Shakespeare. --- from "What's Wrong With the World", Chapter IV "The Romance of Thrift" (1910)
- o. To be born into this earth is to be born into uncongenial surroundings, hence to be born into a romance. --- from "Heretics", Chapter XIV "On Certain Modern Writers and the Institution of the Family" (1905)
- o. We ought to see far enough into a hypocrite to see even his sincerity. --- from "Heretics", Chapter V "Mr. H. G. Wells and the Giants" (1905)
- o. **When some English moralists write about the importance of having character, they appear to mean only the importance of having a dull character.** --- from "Charles Dickens", Part 2, Chapter X "The Great Dickens Characters" (1906)
- o. Tolerance is the virtue of a man without convictions.
- o. **Without education, we are in a horrible and deadly danger of taking educated people seriously.**
- o. **Fairy tales are more than true - not because they tell us dragons exist, but because they tell us dragons can be beaten.**
- o. You can only find truth with logic if you have already found truth without it.
- o. The thing I hate about an argument is that it always interrupts a discussion.