

Chesterton Quotes signalled in

Guide to the Politico-Economic Ideas of G. K. Chesterton

by *Dr. H. G. Pearce MB*

from **“Heretics” (1905)**

“If we ever get the English back on to the English land they will become again a religious people...” (*c. 6 Christmas and the Aesthetes*)

“... the same frigid and detached spirit that leads to success in the study of astronomy and botany leads to disaster in the study of mythology and human origins... He [the anthropologist] is making himself inhuman in order to study humanity ... If a man desires to find out the origin of religion, let him not go to the Sandwich Islands; let him go to church. If a man wishes to know what society, philosophically speaking, really is, let him not go to the British Museum; let him go into society.” (*c. 11 Science and the Savages*)

from **“Orthodoxy” (1908)**

“We do not need a censorship of the press. We have a censorship by the press.” (*c. 7 The Eternal Revolution*)

“The secularists have not wrecked divine things, but the secularists have wrecked secular things ...” (*c. 8 The Romance of Orthodoxy*)

“Man is the only wild animal.” (*c. 9 Authority and the Adventurer*)

from **“All Things Considered” (1908)**

“Is it not only too probable that the mildness of our political satire, when compared to the political satire of our fathers, arises simply from the profound unreality of our current politics?” (*Conceit and Caricature*)

“It [the English party system] is founded upon the principle that half a truth is better than no politics.” (*The Boy*)

from **“Alarms and Discursions” (1910)**

“... wealth in society as now constituted does not tend to get into the hands of the thrifty or the capable, but actually tends to get into the hands of wastrels and imbeciles.” (*c. 31 The Flat Freak*)

from **“Miscellany of Men” (1912)**

“[The voters] cannot have what they choose, but only which [of two party policies] they choose. The democracy has a right to answer questions, but it has no right to ask them. It is still the political aristocracy [i.e. plutocracy] that asks the question. And we shall not be unreasonably cynical if we suppose that the political aristocracy will always be rather careful what questions it asks.” (*The Voter and the Two Voices*)

from **“Cobbett” (1925)**

"What he [Cobbett] saw was the perishing of the whole English power of self-support, the growth of cities that drain and dry up the countryside, the growth of dense dependent populations incapable of finding their own food, the toppling triumph of machines over men, the sprawling omnipotence of financiers over patriots, the herding of humanity in nomadic masses whose very homes are homeless, the terrible necessity of peace and the terrible probability of war; the wealth that may mean famine and the culture that may mean despair; the bread of Midas and the sword of Damocles. In a word, he saw what we see, but he saw it when it was not there. And some cannot see it - even when it is there." (*c. 1 The Revival of Cobbett*)

“It may be that socialism threatens to destroy domesticity [i.e. the family]. But it is capitalism that destroys it. This doubtless is what is meant by saying that capitalism is the more practical of the two.” (*c. 2 A Self-made Man*)

from **“Outline of Sanity” (1926)**

“The truth is that what we call Capitalism ought to be called Proletarianism.” (*c. I, I The Beginning of the Quarrel*)

“A Socialist Government is one which in its nature does not tolerate a true and real opposition. For there the Government provides everything; and it is absurd to ask a Government to provide an opposition.” (*c. I, I The Beginning of the Quarrel*)

from **“Generally Speaking” (1928)**

“To be merely practical is to be dogmatic without a dogma.”

“... all futurism must be a sort of fatalism. It cannot foresee the free part of human action; it can foresee the servile part.”

(Unfortunately, not having easy access to this book, we have not been able to verify these quotes – we would be grateful to anyone who can)

from **“Chaucer” (1932)**

“[Why did Shaw say he despised Shakespeare's intellect? Because] he was looking for a system, one of the very little systems that do very truly have their day. The system of Kant; the system of Hegel; the system of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Marx and all the rest. In each of these examples a man sprang up and pretended to have a thought that nobody had ever had. But the great poet only professes to express the thought that everybody had always had... what the world saw [in Shakespeare] was not what G.B.S. was then looking for [a “message”, or “original thought”]. ”

(c. 1 The Greatness of Chaucer)

“I have been mixed up more or less all my life in such mild revolutions as my country could provide; and have been rather more extreme, for instance, in my criticism of Capitalism than many who are accused of Communism. That, I think, is being a good citizen; but it is not being a great poet; and I should never set up to be a great poet on any ground, but least of all on that ground. A great poet, as such, deals with eternal things; and it would indeed be a filthy notion to suppose that the present industrial and economic system is an eternal thing.” *(c. 1 The Greatness of Chaucer)*

“The real trouble of the Middle Ages lay in their rudimentary and relatively bad communications for the handing on of their good things; not in the least in their not having the good things to communicate. We are in a position to appreciate the distinction at the present moment; when we have very good communications and nothing to communicate... [which] can be best tested by comparing their processes with a practical thing like a large modern newspaper; that loud and regular organ by which our civilisation daily proclaims that it has nothing to say.”*(c. 9 The Moral of the Story)*

from **“All I Survey” (1933)**

“Educationalists have the task of putting the school in order before anyone

has put the State in order. It is arguable that we ought to put the State in order before there can really be such a thing as a State school.” (c. XXXI *On Education*)

“Private powers acting as public powers, monopolies, boycotts, big shops, publishing syndicates and similar things do, in fact, inflict restrictions which we would not allow the State of Church to inflict”. (c. XVI *On a New Tax*)

from **“As I Was Saying” (1936)**

“Communism is the child and heir of Capitalism.” (*Essay XVIII: About the Workers*)

“... our politicians do not control our politics. Even the best of them are forced to a continuous compromise by the pressure of private interests, which are also public monopolies; and it is these commercial monopolies that rule the State.” (*Essay XVII: About Political Creeds*)

These are but a few of the things that Chesterton had to say, a hundred years ago, on the state of modern society. It is sobering to note how little things have changed since his day.

The problem with quoting Chesterton is that he wrote so much with such deep insight on so many things that one suffers from an embarrassment of choice.

However, we cannot resist making reference to one or two (or three) more. The relevance of the first will be evident to all who followed the Pope's visit for World Youth Day through certain sections of the Sydney Press and Media. The other two are matters of social morals and manners that were coming into vogue in Chesterton's time but are still with us.

The Everlasting Man. (1925)

"When the world goes wrong, it proves rather that the Church is right. The Church is justified, not because her children do not sin, but because they do." (*Introduction*)

As I Was Saying. (1936)

"It is especially the educational film that threatens to darken and weaken the human intelligence. . . A false film might be refuted in a hundred books, without much affecting the million dupes who had never read the books but only seen the film."

Avowals and Denials. (1934)

"Of all modern phenomena, the most monstrous and ominous, the most manifestly rotting with disease, the most grimly prophetic of destruction, the most clearly and unmistakably inspired by evil spirits, the most instantly and awfully overshadowed by the wrath of heaven, the most near to madness and moral chaos, the most vivid with devilry and despair, is the practice of having to listen to loud music while eating a meal in a restaurant."