

What G. K. Chesterton Saw in America

The Eminent English Essayist Declares That While in the U. S. He Fairly Longed to See a Sulky Woman—Elderly Women More Beautiful and More Dignified Than Their Daughters—American Sports Not Sportive.

By Professor W. T. Allison.

America has been a Klondike for many English men-of-letters. A long string of them have come across the seas to capitalize their literary reputation on the lecture platform in the United States. Dickens, Thackeray, Matthew Arnold, Huxley, and dozens of authors in more recent times have reaped golden harvests in the new world. Dickens made two triumphal tours in the United States and was received with lavish hospitality which he failed to appreciate, for in his "American Notes" he made fun of his hosts. Matthew Arnold was a dismal failure as a lecturer but received the same generous treatment as his brethren. He had the bad grace to go home and write that America was utterly lacking in beauty; he asserted that the only picturesque thing that he saw during his travels was a sleigh half turned about on a frozen pond. He also tried to make a little extra money by publishing in book form the lectures which he have visited American cities. The majority of English lecturers who have visited America, however, have imitated Dickens by registering their impressions of Uncle Sam's country. So many books of this sort have been published that it would require a special alcove to hold them. Some of them are worth a while, but as a general rule they are lacking in good taste and betray the insular prejudice and downright ignorance of their makers. And the latest volume to be added to this Englishman-across-the-sea library of snap judgments is "What I Saw in America," by G. K. Chesterton (Hodder and Stoughton, London and Toronto). As a lecturer, nimble-witted Gilbert was an utter failure, even more disappointing to his trans-Atlantic readers than Matthew Arnold, but his book, while monumental in verbosity, is much better than the usual rapid-fire performance of the visiting English author. In this fat book by England's literary Jumbo there is some very clever reticentation and, best of all, Americans will be able to read it without reviling this author as an ingrate and a snob.

All American Hotels Look Alike to Him.

Chesterton follows his countrymen who have written books of America by making fun of the hotels which gave him shelter. He tells the people back home that in the new world there are "hotels topping to the stars, hotels covering the acreage of villages, hotels in multitudinous number like a mob of Babylonian or Assyrian monuments," but he complains that there are no inns in the United States or Canada. Evidently, in his hurried visit to Toronto, no one told him about the Inn at Grimsby, Ontario, a resort de luxe for Hamiltonians. All American hotels look alike to Chesterton, a sure sign that he did not remain very long in the country or depart from the main railway lines during his lecture tour. "Broadly speaking," he says, "there is only one hotel in America. The pattern of it, which is a very rational pattern, is repeated in cities as remote from each other as the capitals of European empires. You may find that hotel rising among the red blooms of the warm spring woods of Nebraska, or whitened with Canadian snows near the eternal noise of Niagara." He was surprised to find that the hotel rotunda was thronged by people who were not necessarily guests. The ground floors he points out, are used almost as public streets, or rather public squares. "My first impression was that I was in some sort of a high street or market-place during a carnival or a revolution. The whole of the lower floor is thrown open to the public streets and treated as a public square. But above it and all around it runs another floor in the form of a sort of deep gallery, furnished more luxuriously and looking down on the moving mobs beneath. No one is allowed on this floor except the guests or clients of the hotel. As I have been one of them myself, I trust it is not unympathetic to compare them to active anthropoids who can climb trees, and so look down in safety on the herds or packs of wilder animals wandering and

prowl below. Of course there are modifications to it; it is the plan that seems to suit the social life of the American cities. There is generally something like a ground floor that is more public, a half-floor or gallery above that is more private, and above that the bulk of the block of bedrooms, the huge hive with its innumerable and identical cells."

The Color and Fire of Broadway.

When Mr. Chesterton looked for the first time on the winking electric signs high up in the Broadway sky, on the long kaleidoscope of colored lights advertising everything from pork to pianos, he said to his American friends, "What a glorious garden of wonders this would be to any one who was lucky enough to be unable to read." With this as a text, he proceeds to picture the emotions of an illiterate peasant who had been told a great deal about the land of liberty and who, looking up at all this nightly glory of Broadway, imagined that the electric motes, appearing and disappearing, were proclaiming the principles of the republic. "He would be shrewd enough to guess," says Chesterton in a vein of delicious humor, "that the three festoons fringed with fiery words of somewhat similar pattern stood for 'Government of the People, For the People, By the People,' for it must obviously be that, unless it were 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.' His shrewdness would perhaps be a little shaken if he knew that the triad stood for 'Tang Tonic Today; Tang Tonic Tomorrow; Tang Tonic All the Time.' He will soon identify a restless ribbon of red lettering, red hot and rebellious, as the saying, 'Give me liberty or give me death.' He will fail to identify it as the equally famous saying, 'Skyline Has Gout Beaten to a Frazzle.' Therefore, it was that I desired the peasant to walk down that grove of fiery trees, under all that golden foliage, and fruits like monstrous jewels, as innocent as Adam before the Fall. He would see sights almost as fine as the flaming sword or the purple and peacock plumage of the seraphim; so long as he did not go near the Tree of Knowledge."

American Business Is Romance.

One of the most amusing chapters in Mr. Chesterton's bulky book is devoted to a paradoxical consideration of the American business man. The English wit notes with delight that the New Yorker is very unpunctual. The hustling American business man is always late. Chesterton first noticed this in connection with his own lectures. He says that he could easily understand a crowd of commercial Americans not going to his lecture at all, but there was something odd about seeing them drift in long after the hour advertised for the performance. "Not that I objected to that," he observes. "It seemed to me an agreeable break in the monotony; but as a characteristic of a people engaged in practical business, it struck me as curious and interesting. I have grown accustomed to being the most unbusiness-like person in any given company; and it gave me a sort of dizzy exaltation to find I was not the most unpunctual person in that company." And what was the impression Chesterton formed of the American business man? Was it unfavorable? Not at all! He declares with an indulgent smile that the American is too busy to have business habits, too earnest to have business rules. Business to the American is the romance of life. Even a meat salesman of Chicago sells his commodity with a fine poetic enthusiasm. And this fervor commends itself to G.K.C. In fact he seems behind and beneath the frantic rush after the dollar the idealism of the American business man who is more interested in the game of grabbing it than in the money grabbed. "We shall admire or deplore this spirit," says Mr. Chesterton in a subtle paragraph, "accordingly as we are glad to see trade irradiated with so much poetry, or sorry to see so much poetry wasted on trade. But it does make many people happy, like any other hobby; and one is disposed to add that it does fill their imaginations

Spartan Character of American Sports.

Every English visitor to America goes home to write about baseball and athletics generally in the United States. Perhaps if Mr. Chesterton had been able to see a few ball games he might have been more kindly in his remarks about American sport, but he came in the winter when both baseball and golf were out of season. What he says about the American athlete, however, has a flavor of truth. "American sport," he writes, "is not in the least sportive. It is because it is not very sportive that we sometimes say it is not very sporting. It has the vices of a religion. It has all the paradox of original sin in the service of aboriginal faith. It is sometimes untruthful because it is sincere. It is sometimes treacherous because it is loyal. Men lie and cheat for it as they lied for their lords in a feudal conspiracy, or cheated for their chiefs in a Highland feud. We may say that the vessel readily committed treason; but it is equally true that he readily endured torture. So does the American athlete endure torture. Not only the self-sacrifice but the solemnity of the American athlete is like that of the American Indian. The athletes in the States have the attitude of the athletes

among the partans, the great historical nation without a sense of humor. They suffer an ascetic regime not to be menaced in any monasticism and hardly in any militarism. If any tradition of these things remains in a saner age, they will probably be remembered as a mysterious religious order of fakirs or dancing dervishes, who shaved their heads and fasted in honor of Hercules or Castor and Pollux. And that is really the spiritual atmosphere though the gods have vanished; and the religion is subconscious and therefore irrational. For the problem of the modern world is that it has ceased to be religious when it has ceased to be rational. Americans really would starve to win a coconut shy. They would fast or bleed to win a race of paper boats on a pond. They would rise from a sick bed to listen to Mrs. Asquith." My readers will conclude from the passages that I have quoted that Mr. Chesterton has written an interesting, in fact a highly original book about America. In addition to the topics which I have dealt with he discusses such subjects as "Presidents and Problems," "The Extraordinary American," "The Republican in the Ruins," "The Atlantic Narrowing," "Lincoln and Lost Causes," "A New Martin Chuzzlewit," "The Spirit of America" and "The Future of Democracy." He has crammed over three hundred pages with Gilbertian sense and Chestertonian nonsense.

—W. T. ALLISON.

Literary Notes.

Fruit farming in the Niagara peninsula on the shores of Lake Ontario is the theme of a new story, "Possession," by Mazo de la Roche, a Toronto authoress. Derek Vale, the owner of the farm, falls in love with Fawnie, a young Indian girl, whose people come to the farm to pick berries and cherries. This novel, which is more realistic than most, in tone, is published by the Macmillan Company of Toronto.

After an exhaustive study of data derived from observation, biography, scholastic records and laboratory investigations of the effects of smoking on the intellectual processes, Prof. M. V. O'Shea, in "Tobacco and Mental Efficiency," draws the conclusion that it has not yet been proved that the use of tobacco necessarily prevents the attainment of the highest mental efficiency in mature persons. He does, however, maintain that investigation leads to the conclusion that tobacco is detrimental to the intellectual work of college students as well as of high school pupils.

Miss Bathsheba Askwith, who has made an enviable reputation by her artistic productions of Hindu dramas and lyrics, is presenting "Chitra," by Rabindranath Tagore, in Boston this month. Miss Askwith says that each time she gives "Chitra" people come to her and tell her that they have gained from the play a new interpretation of life. She describes "Chitra" as "the greatest love poem of modern times after Wagner's 'Tristan and Isolde.'"

German students are having a hard time these days. Ten thousand of them are employed in the mines and metal factories. A theological work by Dr. Deissmann used widely in German divinity classes costs 36,000 marks unbound and 50,000 marks bound. Imagine a Canadian theological student paying \$9,000 to \$12,000 for a single text book!

Here is a charming poem from "The Great Dream," a new volume of verse by Marguerite Wilkinson, a well-known American poetess:

THE ROBBER IN ENGLAND.

I am a robber from over the seas; I have come stealing things like these: The slant of the hills toward Paracombe Town, The look of the sea from Perlock down, The patchwork of fields with hedges between, Dividing the new-ploughed red from green, Like a magical quilt-stitched set to bind Fields upon hills around and behind. I have come stealing the tilt of the thatches Where villages doze among the green patches, Where each little house as the road winds around Seems to have grown from a root in the ground. For almost as natural as trees are they With the dull brown thatch above the stone's old gray, Of ancient plaster firm and mellow in quiet tones of cream or yellow. These I have stolen, stolen away To make them mine till my dying day; And neither the King in Buckingham Palace Nor the gracious Queen with her crown of gold Will take them from me, for all without malice What I have taken I mean to hold.

The insignificant often are the most to be feared. Forget others' faults by remembering your own.

Milk Tree Yields Cream The milk tree, which flourishes in Brazil, yields a sap which is very much like thick cream and in flavor scarcely distinguishable from cow's milk, though slightly coarser. As a drink, mixed with water, it is said to be delicious. The bark of the tree is red in color and the natives extract a red dye from it, which they use to dye their cloth. The wood is hard and durable and is much used in the construction of native houses. The tree also yields a

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"There Were Many Things Which I Could Not Eat" Mrs. H. Robert Wells, English Harbour, Trinity Bay, Nfld., writes: "I was troubled with nervous dyspepsia—so much so that there were a great many things I could not eat at all on account of the distressed feeling afterwards. I used many different remedies, but they did me little good. Finally I tried Dr. Chase's Nerve Food and Kidney-Liver Pills, and was surprised at the relief this combined treatment gave me in such a short time." DR. CHASE'S NERVE FOOD

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