

PREACHMENT OF A CLOWN

MAY it please the Company—Worthies, Worships, Elders and all my Betters: you know how a chance-found quotation will sometimes fish up from one's subconscious mind a haul of impressions which, when they come to the surface, prove to be a valuable addition to one's philosophy of life?

That has just happened to me, when, searching through one of my Common Place Books for Somebody's terse and pertinent remark about Something, I came upon these words of Ernest Hello; whereupon I had to leave my other occupation to haul up the overwhelming catch of ideas and impressions it gave me.

'Little men,' he says, *'borrow all their importance from their actions, which they accomplish. Without these actions they would be absolutely nothing.'*

Here we are again! I said to St. Thomas. This is a piece of Truth!

What a leveller! That deposes more coronetted heads, more bewigged and belauelled, more top-hatted and tortoise-shell spectacled heads than Robespierre and Lenin could have dreamed of deposing, for it deposes both of them to begin with!

It does not merely reduce to the ranks of the Nobodies (sometimes called Humbugs), Mr. Alderman Rosenheimer who climbed, by means of the turnip-cutter in his jam-factory to a position where he receives respect and deference: no, don't you see, it reduces *me* to those ranks! There's the cream of the jest!

Is there one among you who has an ancestor that was a clown, and who knows what it is to have sawdust in the blood, and to take great pleasure in being

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knocked down? There's nothing like it. And what friendship one feels for the man who has done so! Try it. Is there anyone who will come down into the Ring and try it—some Literary Person, if you please. I tell you for why. Because, like me, you borrow all your importance from your actions, which you accomplish! My friend, the one excuse for many of our short-comings, at home and abroad, has been the Artistic Temperament. Literary activities cover a multitude of sins—very well, then, we will say faults—faults, such as Selfishness, a Carping Spirit, Discourtesy, Wilful Sadness and Vanity. If the Ring-master were to give you a knock on the head with the butt of his whip, which knocked away all memory of Grammar and the Sonnet-form, what would be left? Something like a snail with his shell knocked away.

Come! Have I hurt your Worshipful Dignity? Have I been impertinent? But if I were not, I should cease to be a Clown. A respectful clown would be a tedious fellow, salt without savour. Still, it is Christian to respect the dignity of every man, and so let us change the metaphor for you (though I will keep it for myself, for a clown is a Christian creature, while . . .). If you prefer it, Sir, have you any Titan blood in you, that gets up gigantically refreshed from touching the earth? Or would it help you to consider M. Hello as a psychological Tax Collector? Instinctively, a gentleman would be inclined to assess himself as low as possible. I will look away, tactfully, while you divest yourself of your actions, of your badges of office and the garniture of all success.

It is bound to be an awful business, this. The stage of life would re-set itself if everyone did so. Everything would change its shape and place.

Are you done, Sir? So am I. I have kept only these overalls which I must wear as Clown. Why, Sir, but all's brought to nought, for when you doffed

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all that borrowed importance, and dared to stand without it, *ipso facto*, you became a Great Man! You see, in the Ring, it's all topsy-turvey!

Wait a moment though. Now you are a Great Man, you can dare to consult that Sybil who can tell you the Past—the Sybil of Conscience. She'll give you dread answers to the questions you put to her. Ask her some. Ask her why your last book sold so well. Ask her why the Editor of the *Morning After* tolerated that unspeakable twaddle you wrote about ——. Well then, ask her what St. Thomas thinks of the reading you do

Oh, I am sorry you have left me. It's gruesome, I know. It is like one of Albrecht Dürer's drawings, with all the bones showing, and every man a skeleton.

Forgive me, Sirs. It was only the olive before I offer you a feast of thought. It was the *apéritif* of healthy and sophisticated custom.

Can you not call to mind many Great Men (and women of course), with whom you have the honour to be on terms of friendship? You can tell them on this wise: *if their occupations, their surnames, their income and their reputations were changed or taken away, it would not alter them.* There are more than ten of them in our city.

They are the foundation stones of history. And since I see there a Historian who is amused at my impertinence, I beg to address myself to him. Can nothing be done, Sir, to prevent the humbugging of children who are forced to pore over school biographies and histories? Half those books are written on the presumption—tacit, I grant you, but does that lessen it?—that any man who made a noise in the world, was, good or bad, a Great Man. When half the time they were but fleas who were an elusive cause of irritation, and caused a stir because they

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distracted statesmen from their business or Justice from her clear duty, which could not be proceeded with until they had been put out of action.

Now's the time to do it, for it is fashionable to dethrone traditional heroes, and to pull the crowns off kings and queens and show them to have been snuffy, dirty, mentally-deficient puppets, dull in their dubious virtue or in their deplorable vices.

Let's pull the laurels off some of the literary notorieties! Let us take our weights and measures out of the *Summa*, and weigh up the real worth of the writers whose names throng the pages printed for children and for the Reading Public. Then let us write them down anew for what they were: Z—a great liar, but an admirable stylist; Y—a popular bigot whose name is known because of his assiduous attendance at Court; Y—a great gentleman, a Christian and a poet.

Now I beg to address myself to Mr. Courage the Critic, who is looking at me through his eye-glass. Why, Sir, between you and my Creator, I am terribly considered, and I can only bear myself with the simplicity of one who is putting no trust in his own merits. Mr. Critic, Sir, why should we continue to remember Decadent the Poet for odes that we can only hope Almighty God has, in forgiving them, forgotten? Are eyes and intellects to be used for reading and storing up facts about the tea-parties of Lady Tremendously Trivial, and the idiosyncrasies of the Reverend Very Dubious? Why scuffle up this dust? Have we run short of stars and heroes in Christendom, and is not this planet dusty and mediocre enough? Why, Sir, even you seem to me to be all shrivelled small and dried up for lack of the Water from the Well of Bethlehem!

The future generation will either be Little Men with importances borrowed from advertisement, or

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Great Men who live the Truth they have the honour to believe. Hey, what a fine topsy-turvey a generation of Christians would make! Ah, Sirs, what Persons of Influence you are to be sure! The next generation will be of such stuff as you write for their young minds to feed on. Ninety-nine out of a hundred of them and more, will never read St. Thomas; but they'll read a deal of articles in papers that might be written according to the principles of St. Thomas. They'll soon discover for themselves the Writers who tell them a lie, but it takes more cunning to discover the Writers who are making the wrong things important, or the right things important for a wrong reason.

What can you do, my Masters?

Poet, had I a tune in my pen as you have in yours, I could set the world dancing to whatever measure I chose—even to a measure of Truth.

And were I your colour-boy, Painter (a proud thing to be a colour-boy to one of the School of Fra Angelico) I would grind you black and white, vair and vermilion to paint on the very brains of the next generation pictures of men and their symbols, ranked according to Truth, even as Fra Angelico painted them, kneeling to the task. Oh, we would swing the popular mentality back to a true perspective! We would not paint for the critics, we would paint for the crowd! We would show them the choirs of Apostles and Evangelists of the Truth, Martyrs and Confessors of the Truth. We would send them drifting back from our pictures to the Priory church, head on breast, changing even as they went from that Little Man the Pharisee to that Great Man who said: 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'

Poet, for the love of Mary who is pitiful, make me such a rhyme!

Painter, an alms to Truth!

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I am a Clown, a little man who borrow all my importance from this action which I have accomplished : I have preached to those who listen on Sundays to the Friars Preachers ! Why, I have even greeted Truth with : ' Here we are again ! '

CECILY HALLACK.

BOOK REVIEWS

SURVIVALS AND NEW ARRIVALS. By Hilaire Belloc. (Sheed and Ward ; 7/6).

Mr. Belloc's new book, *Survivals and New Arrivals*, marks a culmination in his already extensive work dealing with the Catholic Church. It is a lucidly clear exposition of the divergent qualities of the foes with which the Church has contended in the past, and whose strength is weakening ; of the main opposition which She is at present facing ; and of the new arrivals which are beginning to raise their heads against Her.

As might be expected by those who know Mr. Belloc's power as a writer there is much scathing criticism and reasoned denunciation of the attacking forces, more particularly of the ' Modern Mind,' which he describes as ' the spirit which has lost acquaintance with logical form and is too supine to reason,' but which ' being (alas !) not active, but a passive obstacle, like a bog, is none the weaker for being thus irrational ' ; yet the main impression left upon the mind of the reader—and it is a deep and lasting impression—is certainly not destructive, but pre-eminently and optimistically creative ; and, as the theme unfolds, more and more does he feel the presence of inspiration. I use the two words ' optimistically ' and ' inspiration ' advisedly. Mr. Belloc's greatest enemy could not accuse him of optimism in the cheapened sense of vaguely hoping for the best in a world where things may not be as bad as they seem. The optimism of *Survivals and New Arrivals* depends upon no reassuring statement by the author, but arises rather from the very core of the subject and its logical presentment, and in spite of the tremendous dangers which the book foresees. It is in this optimism, as well as in such remarkable passages as the one which condenses the history of Islam so brilliantly into