Chapter II

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Most of the critics do not look at Chesterton as essentially a detective story writer. Either his achievement in that genre is overlooked or a reluctant reference to it is made. Critics like Edmund Wilson harbour a supercilious attitude towards this new genre that makes them avoid 'this unmentionable aspect' of a writer. However, G.K. Chesterton's reputation among readers the world over depends mainly on his Father Brown stories. Strangely he is not usually discussed as a detective story writer in the sense in which we refer to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, though Father Brown is as immortal as Sherlock Holmes. Sometimes public acclaim shrouds the best of a writer. Conan Doyle's Holmes has eclipsed some of his best non-detective works. Father Brown is the reverse of this. He is pushed to the background by the bulk of Chesterton's non-detective works. Holmes when he was brought to the world made his creator famous overnight. But Father Brown was brought to a world which knew Chesterton already. He started his career as a journalist though Father Brown stories have earned him the enduring reputation that he enjoys now. Conan Doyle wrote numerous
stories, historical, adventurous, terror etc. and also the well-known Sherlock Holmes stories. But it so happens that from the popular point of view in both cases the detective stories steal the show leaving the other writings to serious critics.

Chesterton is one of the more popular journalist-turned-writers. The various literary fields in which he excelled were poetry, the discursive essay, novel, drama, criticism, biography and detective fiction. He was in addition a cut and thrust debater, a fine humorist and wit, a Christian apologist, a commentator on political affairs, the founder of Distributist Movement, the editor of The New Witness and G.K.'s Weekly, a columnist of repute, a popular broadcaster and the first President of the Detection Club. Though his versatility is proved by his many-sided achievements, he is best known for his contributions to the periodicals and his Father Brown stories. His popular reputation rests at this level though critics might prefer to confine themselves to noticing his Napoleon of Notting Hill, The Man Who was Thursday, The Ballad of White Horse and a few other pieces. This only means that his survival is likely to be at two levels: (1) the learned (2) the popular. The English reading public and the educated elite abroad, especially, in the British colonies, became familiar with Chesterton more
because of Father Brown stories, than by his essays, speeches and pamphlets on politics and religion. His style is essentially aristocratic (though he champions the cause of the poor) and the exuberance of his brilliant paradoxes make exciting reading. This would naturally inhibit easy comprehension particularly for the average reader; the same style, however, employed with less gusto in the Father Brown stories, in view of the plot, characterization and purpose reaches an extensive reading public.

Chesterton is very much at home with this genre. This is due to his love of and his mastery over it. This love of detective fiction dates back to his childhood fantasies. In fact, even the adult Chesterton was a grown up child who had retained some of those fantasies. The childlike nature of G.K. Chesterton and his simplicity which many would deem virtues could be quoted against him by some critics. His manner of communication is capable of misleading unwary critics into supposing that he is not serious in his writings. He breathed the air of detection in everything he saw, spoke and did: he possessed a detective's personality and perspective, acumen and aspirations. Possibly this

love of detection was carried a bit too far; in fact it was manifested in one of his eccentricities namely of carrying a sword stick and revolver always, even on his wedding day with the idea of protecting his bride from brigands\(^2\). He considered his autobiography itself as a detective story\(^3\). This would dispose of the question whether any critic is justified in excluding what is fundamental, essential and relevant to the personality of a creative artist, while assessing his position in literature.

In his autobiography Chesterton speaks of some guilt and sin though nothing specific is mentioned. Critics try to prove with his notebook\(^4\) that he was trying to save himself by becoming a Roman Catholic, a homosexual and a child\(^5\). There is a suicidal tendency discernible in his earliest compositions.

"I had grown weary of him...
I did not hate him: but I wished him dead...
That man I sought to slay was I"


This sense of guilt and shame was overcome by Chesterton soon. But it did not completely vanish. It was lurking in one corner of his mind offering a mild threat now and then. There is enough evidence to show that G.K. Chesterton suffered a certain mental aberration, perhaps not very pronounced, in his youth. In his late teens he passed through a phase of mental disease bordering on madness. He had horrible fancies which he put into drawings... in a poem to his friend E.C. Bentley he speaks of "the sick cloud upon the soul when we were boyish together". Much of his poetry and more of his fiction are overshadowed by the "evil twilight of a child's nightmare swelling to a horror which only some sudden act of violence can dissipate. This internal tension he resolved by simplifying every situation into a conflict between an evil oppression and a liberating champion". One feels that probably Chesterton was trying to get rid of his sins by writing detective stories. There is a record of Chesterton having replied, to many who asked him the reason for joining the Catholic Church, that he wanted to get rid of his sins. He earnestly believed that there was no other religious system that could really get


rid of people's sins. The next alternative for him was to write detective stories. His advice to young men was to get rid of their 'criminal impulses' by writing detective stories. In the absence of a religious confession, one can confess, in writing. In a broad sense his detective novels are confessions of his sins in print. He had, 'enacted all his mental atrocities on paper'. He says:-

"I must have committed at least 53 murders and been concerned with hiding about half a hundred corpses for the purpose of the concealment of crimes: hanging one corpse on hatpeg, bundling another into a postman's bag, decapitating a third and providing it with somebody else's head".

What is closest to one's personality finds expression in writing. More than his views on politics, his confessions reveal his personality: his confessions are the motivating force behind his writing. That forms the essence of his art. In Chesterton's art the essence is detection. It ranges from detection of crimes to theological self-detection. This validates the inference that he was primarily a detective story writer before being a journalist, essayist,  

9) Ibid.
etc. He used the art of journalism to communicate his ideas. Even his love of paradox, which is mysterious writing of sorts, is born out of his love of detection and practice of a special line of thinking to detect crimes. The unusual angle from which he takes a look at things is essentially a detective's capability.

The literary career of Chesterton accidentally coincided with the dawn of a new era. On Queen Victoria's death in 1901, King Edward VII succeeded to the throne. Chesterton had just then completed publishing *Greybeards at Play* (1900) and *The Wild Knight* (1900). Though he was born in the Victorian age he did not inherit its spirit.

Oscar Wilde's homosexuality, Cecil Rhodes' Conspiracy and a number of other things so disillusioned him that he lost faith in the Victorian ideals and loudly condemned their hypocrisy. The following decade is considered the Edwardian era: there had been no specific literary revolution in that period. Some say he is an Edwardian, some call him Georgian. The latter perhaps think that it may not


exactly be correct to call him an Edwardian because he was then in the formative years of his career.

A reaction to Victorianism set in the Edwardian era and was carried on to the Georgian. The cherished ideals of Chesterton became out of date, perhaps prematurely due to the global wars. The Edwardian Debaters, a legend and pride of that era, became windbags in the Georgian. As in the case of the Romanticists, the climate was not conducive to any literary movement. The wars disrupted the social system leading to apathy. But then, even the term 'Georgian' is not perfectly suited to him. By the time his artistic ability and philosophy matured he felt his values were becoming outdated in the light of a new war-weary society. In classifying a writer, the reign of the King or Queen cannot be a sure criterion, but only a set of values cherished by the author which was also the common practice of the society of the day. Hence both these terms Edwardian and Georgian are elusive. Moreover, labelling a writer limits his scope and perception. An author's thoughts transcend the narrow limits of politics or religion except when there is ideological commitment. But still the essential
characteristic of the Edwardian period was the very reaction generated then by the end of the Victorian era. The formal values of the previous age were rejected with a force which constituted a kind of new Romanticism coming on the heels of Rossetti and Swinburne suggestive even in Thomas Hardy. In this atmosphere of liberalism G.K. Chesterton played a new role of justifying the past with unusual optimism and fought the self-declared revolutionaries like Shaw but still he was a child of his age and so could not help being an Edwardian whose main feature was to have transmitted to the Georgian era what it inherited from the Victorian adding its own special flavour to what it transmitted.

The expression 'Edwardian' defies precise definition. V.S. Prichett in 'Secret Terrors' says "the imagination of the Edwardian writers is nurtured not so much by the sap of nature as by printer's ink. It is an ad hoc imagination, a product of the will and opinion". 13

Swinnerton says that "the true Edwardians represent the tumultuous change of liberalism passing over the country between 1906 and 1910". 14

13) V.S. Prichett, Half Century, p. 324.
epigrammatically says it was "an age with its own system of agreed meanings in time".\textsuperscript{15} He goes on to add that "The one special feature of the age of Edward was that the great paperweight of Victoria's presence had been removed".\textsuperscript{16} Actually the weight was lifted in every other field only in 1918-19. Perhaps the new weightlessness meant also directionlessness, a new mythology sans grammar. One of the suggested characteristics of the Edwardian Age was that the intellectual revolution engineered by Darwin meant the substitution of aesthetic principles for Christianity. This was not shared by G.K. Chesterton but it continued ever afterwards. G.E. Moore's moral philosophy embodied in the \textit{Principia Ethica} symbolises this change. But G.K. Chesterton's passionate defence of Christianity was somewhat out of step with the growth of post-Victorian values.

Frank Swinnerton wrote in 1935 "that Edwardian was used in the 1920s as a term of abuse. The object was to suggest that Shaw, Wells, Conrad and Bennett were out of date".\textsuperscript{17} This could well have been the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} J.P. Stern, 'On realism' quoted in \textit{Edwardian Novelists} by John Batchelor, p.2.
\item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid}, p. 1.
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid}.
\end{itemize}
well-known snobbery of every generation towards its predecessors.

Wilfred Sheed is of the opinion that it was a time when life was just serious enough without being too serious. It was a mood of relaxation which made people meditative\(^\text{18}\).

A certain similarity in attitudes and achievement among the following points to a recognizable age: Augustine Birrell, Philip Guedalla, E.V. Lucas, A.G. Gardiner, Dean Inge, Max Beerbohm H.G. Wells, G.B. Shaw, Hilaire Belloc, Aldous Huxley, the Webbs, the Coles, E.C. Bentley, J.B. Priestly, Robert Lynd and so on. These men were all controversy-loving essayists, journalists, debaters and among the lot G.K. Chesterton reigned nearly supreme.

G.K. Chesterton's childhood and adolescent life throw some light on his literary career. St. Paul's School reports describe him as 'a great blunderer with much intelligence'. The friendship he made with E.C. Bentley and Lucian Oldershaw at St. Paul's lasted till his last breath. These three literary-minded musketeers created the 'Junior Debating Club'(J.D.C.) in their teens in 1891. Oldershaw proposed that they should also publish their own magazine and have it

\(^{18}\) Wilfred Sheed, *Half Century*, p. 162.
printed. The J.D.C. had a telescopic influence on the career of Chesterton. Oldershaw was the prime mover in the making of Chesterton's first appearance in print. A serious poem entitled 'The Song of Labour' was published in 1891 in the *Speaker*. In the same year J.D.C. brought out its prestigious *Debater*. With his characteristic humour Chesterton remarks that 'his lifelong martyrdom to misprints' had a starting point from then. His article in the *Debater* drew the attention of Mr. Walker, the High Master of the school, who had to reconsider his earlier opinion about him as a dunce. His subsequent achievement of winning the Milton Prize for his poem on St. Francis Xavier, made the High Master confer on him the honour of being ranked with the eighth form when he was only in the sixth. However, much he wanted to pass unnoticed and be inconspicuous, genius would not let him go undetected.

From St. Paul's School he passed to Slade School with a vague hope of pursuing art. Though he did not profit much from the study of art, it accidentally or incidentally, enabled him to do his first regular writing assignment - i.e., review of art books. It has been a fact of his life that he was an

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exceptionally intelligent student who could not learn anything from organised teaching. His mental make-up obliged him to delight in pecking at truths himself rather than be spoonfed. His university education (he never had one) was not formal but vicarious. His constant correspondence and meetings with E.C. Bentley, Oldershaw and the introduction to Belloc and his debating sessions, offered him the advantage of absorbing what they had learnt at the university.

Chesterton's new-found friend Ernest Hodder Williams whom he met at the English Lectures at University College, helped him discover "the easiest of all professions"\(^{20}\), i.e., journalism. He gave him some books on art to review for the *Bookman*.

Mr. Edward Chesterton, was instrumental in promoting the career of his son. He held the 'Golden key' to the secrets of his life. With all the 'Pickwickian evenness of temper and pleasure in the humours of travel'\(^ {21}\), his father encouraged the creative capabilities of his children. He was not the usual type of domineering father but an understanding person who established meaningful communication with his sons. He had a toy-theatre and acted out small plays for his

\(^{20}\) Ibid, p. 100.
sons. His son looked upon him as the promoter of his literary career. His influence on Chesterton was considerable and visible.

After a brief service at the Redway Chesterton joined Fisher Unwin, publishers, and worked with them for several years. Chesterton's cherished dream of becoming a journalist was coming true with the publication of *The Wild Knight* (1898) followed by *Greybeards at play* (1900). Swinburne, Whitman and Browning influenced him as is apparent in the poems of *The Wild Knight*. The 'Donkey', 'The Baby Unborn' are significant among this collection. Much impressed with the 'Donkey' Rudyard Kipling predicted a promising career for him 22. "One Victorian feature of G.K. Chesterton's which is more closely allied to his real strength he got from Oscar Wilde: rhetorical paradox and epigram - e.g., Wilde's dictum that life imitates art far more than art imitates life". 23 But these works left the general public untouched. Mr. Edward Chesterton realised that his gifted son should have a literary agent to establish himself as a writer which led to arranging A.P. Watt to manage his literary affairs.

Introduction to the I.D.K (I Don't Know) Club


by Oldershaw marked another turning point in his life. At his first meeting with Frances Blogg, an active member of the I.D.K., he experienced a Dantecian recognition of a Beatrice. She became the driving force of his life. 'She brought the Cross to him' and meant more to him than a mere wife. This romance remained unapproved on both sides but not unrealistically. When his mother had arranged a bold sports girl, Chesterton opted for a queen. The Chestertons and the Bloggs did not enjoy social parity. He had a long engagement in view of his insufficient income. Mr. Edward offered monetary assistance to improve the financial condition of his son. Greybeards at play (1898) was the first to appear in this way. It is a story in verse about a crew of pirates which he had made up to entertain one of Frances' cousins. This book also did not create any impact on the public.

Oldershaw and Bentley also joined the fray, anxious to become journalists. To increase his income Chesterton worked for Fisher Unwin and the Daily News. His candid views on the Boer war earned him the label


'pro-Boer'. His political creed was tending towards liberalism and he actively campaigned for a liberal candidate in the Khaki election.

Chesterton's speciality lies in the topsy-turvydom of his writing. His articles on William Morris and St. Francis of Assisi introduced 'G.K.C.', by the journalistic vogue of referring to one by initials, to the world. Many a critical eye caught him as the 'metaphysical jester' who juggles with words. For example, about Morris he writes - "he sought to reform the modern life, but hated it."26

Brimley Johnson, the fiance of Gertrude, the deceased sister of Frances, published his first group of essays under the caption The Defendant. This is a defence of a number of popular ideas, opinions, genres, theories which are looked down upon by a section of society with a supercilious attitude. He defends slang, babies, nonsense, rash vows and detective stories. He observes:-

"The cause which is blocking all progress today is the subtle scepticism which whispers in a million ears that things are not good enough to be worth

26) G.K. Chesterton, Quoted by Alizina Dale in The Outline of Sanity, p. 65.
improving. If the world is good, we are revolutionaries. If the world is evil we must be conservative. These essays ... seek to remind men that things must be loved first and improved afterwards... A Defendant is chiefly required when wordlings despise the world".27

While defending detective stories, appearing at once as a revolutionary and a reactionary, Chesterton attacks the high-brow view that detective stories are bad literature. He highlights the artistic merit of detective stories. It is not only a legitimate form of art but also has certain definite and real advantages as an agent of the public weal.28 Romance and adventure take various forms in each age. In the modern era a popular form of literature has arisen in the detective stories as rough and as refreshing as the ballads of Robin Hood.29 Detective stories are police romances reminding us that police management is like knight-errantry.30 The detective symbolises social justice and the original poetic figure preaching that civilisation itself is the most sensational of

28) Ibid., p. 158.
30) Ibid., p. 162.
departures and the most romantic of rebellions. The rationale behind the ideas of the detective story being a romance art-form is not just a defence but a definition. It justifies and recognizes the natural transition of literary forms.

The legendary 'Chester-Belloc', the literary Janus created by Shaw, took the world by a storm of merriment and melancholy. Belloc and Chesterton 'the two brothers in arms' championed the cause of the Boers. Hilaire Belloc was a Radical, a Roman Catholic and an indignant fighter. Being in the company of Evangelists like Conrad Noel, Charles Masterman and other religious men, he could understand that 'idealistic theists and pragmatic atheists had much in common: both were bleating sheep looking for a shepherd'.

It can be stated with some certainty that A.G. Gardiner was responsible for the literary fame of Chesterton. Gardiner identified the artistic genius beneath his annoying absent-mindedness and organisational irregularities. As the editor of the Daily News Gardiner would await an article from Chesterton till the last moment uncomplainingly, for he knew that the

struggle and tension were worth a gold mine. Admiringly and indulgently Gardiner refers to him as "an extravagant figure - undoubtedly the most conspicuous figure in the landscape of London".  

Gardiner and Chesterton had a common ground in politics. They were staunch liberals but never blind followers. Each demanded the freedom to criticize his own party men if they failed to keep up their promises.

The literary world raised its brows when he published his first full-length biography of Robert Browning. His analysis of Browning established that Browning was not for the elite but for all. He did justice to the achievements of Browning with no bias.

This biographical study resulted in another in 1904. It was a portrait of the famous painter G.F. Watts. He puts forward his own theory of the art of painting. Artists make use of symbols to contact reality. If this is absent, art becomes mere drawing or blue-print bereft of meaning and depth.

33) Quoted by Alizina Dale, Ibid, p. 78.
On one of his rambles in the streets of North Kensington, Chesterton was indulgently toying with fantastic adventurous stories like Scott's. Accidentally, he caught sight of a shop bristling with swords and halberds. The romantic mind attempted to make a guess of what these things would be used for and what they would conquer. The cataract of waters from the waterworks flashed to his mind the notion of the idea for The Napoleon of Notting Hill. He created Auberon Quin and Adam Wayne symbolising gravity and humour. The former was King of England chosen by lot with an excessive amount of sense of humour. He revives the medieval splendour by ordering each borough to have its own court of arms, its city walls etc. Adam Wayne of Notting Hill takes it seriously without any sense of humour, goes to war with other boroughs to protect a small street which is pulled down for the development of commercial trade. Battle and bloodshed follow. This human tragedy is the outcome of a mere joke. To Auberon Quin life was a joke whereas to Wayne it was an epic. The antagonism between the humorist and the fanatic is the symbolic theme of this book. The paradoxes and the jokes rendered by way of allegory did not entice all, but at the same time its sales were

appreciable. To some serious-minded, Chesterton's attitude would appear immature, but very few could understand his characteristic approach.

The death of Gertrude, Frances' sister, hastened the marriage of Chesterton. In the hours of grief he felt that his presence and nearness would cure her depression. Hence, ignoring the resentment of his parents Chesterton married Frances. Realising his lack of material prudence he allowed his wife to manage his finance.

A Club of Queer Trades (1905), his first set of detective short stories followed The Napoleon of Notting Hill. There are six crime stories here where actual crimes are committed. Chesterton's idiosyncratic habit of looking at the world upside down leads to his creation of an eccentric Bohemian Club. The ruling tenet of this Club is that its members should have invented a till then unknown way of earning a living. And it becomes almost a secret society. Basil Grant is the detective of all these crimes. Here one can discern the attempt of Chesterton to create a rival for Holmes with a totally opposite philosophy. Application of intuition coupled with common sense is the technique of Basil Grant, and it seems that the foundation for the Father Brown stories was laid in The Club of Queer Trades. Grant and his younger brother,
it was Chesterton's early attempt to establish a detective theory contrary to that of Conan Doyle. The dialogue between Basil Grant and his brother Rupert Grant sounds like the conversation between Chesterton and Conan Doyle. The final triumph is Chesterton's, i.e., of the intuitive theory; Chesterton, understanding the power of the detective story over the public, tries to link his personal philosophy to detection. After a series of experiments in many novels, Chesterton arrives at the definitive form of the Father Brown stories. This is another reason for the inescapable trace of detective element in all that he was writing. But at the same time, to some critics, it gave the impression that he was trying his hand at too many forms.  

Of all the biographies that Chesterton wrote the biography of Dickens was the best; and it is so accepted by most critics. He is himself a miniature Dickens, an intellectual chip of Dickens. The great Victorian novelist was a domestic divinity in his childhood, for Chesterton had heard Dickens at his father's knee in their familial hearth. He was so soaked with Dickensian sensibility and sentiment that he grew into

a miniature Dickens. He discovered in Mr. Edward Chesterton, the geniality of Mr. Pickwick. He deified Dickens and imitated his picturesque style with his characteristic humour and paradox thrown in. His admiration of Dickens stopped not with writing a long critical biography of the great novelist but also enacting with his brother Cecil and a group of friends the 'Mock Trial of John Jasper' of the unfinished The Mystery of Edwin Drood, a remarkable and pioneering detective story of Charles Dickens. Shaw like Chesterton adored Dickens; and both of them, it is said, promoted him to "literary status". But Dickens, like Shakespeare, did not require literary agents to promote his fame. Dickens' genius, according to Chesterton lay in his characters. His novels are "simply lengths cut from the flowing and mixed substance called Dickens...in which any piece will have good and bad parts. For Dickens is like life... akin to the loving principle in us and in the universe... He is alive. His art is like life... It cares for nothing outside itself and goes on its way rejoicing". There is every possible chance that

37) Quoted by Alizina Dale, in The Outline of Sanity, p. 106.

Chesterton could have imbibed the love of detective story from Dickens. Misquotation came naturally to Chesterton. But it never seems a discredit and had no effect on him. Dickens' daughter while appreciating Chesterton's work pointed out the misquotations, but he never bothered to correct them.

*Heretics*, his next work, is a treatise on the philosophies of Shaw, Wells, Kipling, Fitzgerald, Tolstoy, George Moore and others. He dedicated it to his father, though he had differed from some of his father's ideas and beliefs. Characteristically in this book 'heresy' does not mean 'being in the wrong' for him but 'being clear-minded and courageous'. While criticizing others' philosophy he discovers his own.

Wonder and romance are attributes of sanity and madness; a slight disproportion would alter the balance. This theme runs through the three major novels he published; *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904), *The Ball and the Cross* (1906) and *The Man who was Thursday* (1908).

The exaggerated sentiments of Adam Wayne and Auberon Quin would have ended in conflict but Chesterton ends it in a reconciliation. Adam Wayne and Auberon Quin understand each other.
In *The Ball and the Cross*, Turnbull is an atheist, and an extreme leftist. Evan Maclean is a Roman Catholic and a Jacobite. They begin a duel and in the course of it learn a number of things. Each one gets the vision of his own Utopia. Attempts to reform do not solve the matter. No world can be perfect and infallible. In spite of reforms the original sin remains. Chesterton binds their theories with religious values. It is religion that links them socially and politically. Realizing this truth each is converted by the other.

*The Man who was Thursday* is yet another example of Chesterton's narrative art of detection. It is an adventurous tale of two poets in the mixed format of a detective story and an adventure story with the prophecies of Chesterton. Gabriel Syme, a poet and the hero of the novel encounters another who is an anarchist and discusses the meaning of life. After they part they fall into an adventure. When this nightmare of an adventure is over Syme wakes up to see the same London, but his whole outlook has in the meantime changed. The anarchist's sister is used as a symbolic figure, a sort of motif, a kind of epiphany to prove that her memory had sustained him. The anarchists are known

by the names of week days and the lady is the gigantic Sunday. The theme of disguise and revelation once again reminds us of Chesterton's love for the detective novel and its format. It is typically Chestertonian. It is a vision and a prophecy which men will find true when they awake.\(^4\)

All things considered (1908) a collection of essays on a variety of topics ranging from oligarchy, patriotism and education to the growing fancy of the intellectuals for Eastern mythical cults had its title suggested by E.V. Lucas.

Heretics was dedicated to his father and Orthodoxy (1908) to his mother. His mother was to him the all embracing omnipotent who ruled the home and the hearth. Mere faith in religion might lead to wild and baseless romanticism while scepticism could result in intellectual arrogance; and so Chesterton strikes a balance between these two. He discovers the traditional truth of God through sceptical rationalities. The technique and style in telling the tale points to theological self-detection.

The next collection is Tremendous Trifles (1909). The mode of writing these essays was conversational. His treatment of the subject-matter here also

proves that he cannot look at anything without a detective's eye.

"Stylistically these essays are neither so paradoxical nor so convoluted as one is led to expect. Usually they are cast in story form, and in tone and outlook they are close cousins to his Father Brown stories, which, seen from this perspective, then become just another form of Chestertonian narrative art".

The 'Trifles' is full of Chesterton's insights. For him England represents a character and he speaks of her with national pride. Chesterton and Shaw have certain similar insights but the approach and attitude, expression and experience are diagonally opposite. While Chesterton jests heroically, wishing to laugh away the foibles of favourite institutions, Shaw satirises pungently with a view to emphasising the need for change. Tremendous Trifles reflects the genial and chivalrous side of Chesterton.

What is wrong with the world (1910) is a commentary on society and politics. This book is an answer to Charles Masterman's The Condition of England published in 1909. Chesterton dedicated this to Materman. It is a series of connected essays on the

economic, moral and political themes of the day.

1911 saw the best of Chesterton in the collection of stories, featuring Father Brown, a Roman Catholic priest as a sleuth. Father Brown has left an indelible impression on the minds of the readers. He belongs to the category of the immortals in English literature.

The Ballad of the White Horse (1911) is a long narrative poem about the Saxon king Alfred. This poem expresses as usual the Chestertonian faith in liberalism and Catholicism. King Alfred became for him the symbol of Christian faith which faith he wanted the world to know. It was his vision of childhood. This gave him the opportunity to combine history and romance. Dedicating this poem to Frances he referred to her as one 'who brought the Cross to me'.

Man Alive (1912) bears thematic resemblance to The Man Who Was Thursday and The Wild Knight. Here, once again, the narrative art of Chesterton resorts to the form of detective story evolving into an allegorical comedy. The most important philosophy expounded here is that Man is losing his sense of wonder because he fails to discern the wonder of the things that surround him. Instead he goes in search
of wonderful things. Innocent Smith, the hero of this novel is accused of three crimes. House-breaking, bigamy and attempted murder. He is acquitted because it was his own wife with whom he repeatedly eloped and he threatened those who attempted to commit suicide. He attempted murder to test a theory. This novel is packed with dramatic effect. Chesterton's style of detective story is unique. He has an irresistible urge to experiment with the detective story. "The Public courts would have put Smith in a mad house, but these people solve his 'crimes' far more competently by holding the mock High Court of Beacon in the boarding house to try his case. But it is really Smith's accusers who are on trial getting an education in politics and morality; in this way Smith's outlook is preached, to the wide world. This 'court' not only illustrates Chesterton's feeling that the real English courts were controlled by the powerful, but also dramatizes his conviction that the home is the place where society should solve its problems".  

Father O'Connor had, in the course of a conversation, spoken to him about the battle of Lepanto to prove that all wars are religious wars. Chesterton's

inventive brain fed on the theme framing it into the structure of a poem entitled 'Lepanto'. Tributes flowed in after the poem was published. The crowning tribute was paid by John Buchan who sent a note:-

"The other day in the trenches we
    Shouted your Lepanto" 43

The Victorian Age in Literature (1912) is a humane criticism of the Victorian writers. He examines the Victorian compromise between religion and rationalism. Chesterton made a personal criticism of the age; and the Editors took care to append a note explaining that it was not put forward as an authoritative history of Victorian literature. The following, is an excellent example of Chesterton's critical insight.

"The Victorian Age ... thought that commerce outside a country must extend peace; it has certainly often extended war. They thought that commerce inside a country must certainly promote prosperity; it has largely promoted poverty. But for them these were experiments; for us they ought to be lessons". 44

Chesterton learnt a moral from the Victorian era.

43) Quoted by Maisie Ward in G.K.Chesterton, p.317.
44) G.K.Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 114.
Chesterton's interest in writing detective fiction began quite early in his career. He wrote the introduction to the book *The Floating Admiral* brought out by the Detection Club of which he was a member. To this book each member contributed a chapter. It was not only Chesterton but Bentley also who had an unquenchable thirst for detective stories. He was involved in a secret project of writing a detective story for a contest. He had never before attempted a full length book. To win a prize, his story had to be unique. He decided to create a hero who was a 'recognizable human being' and included the usual formula features like motor car chase, a perfect alibi and professional detective losing to an amateur. He reluctantly included the love interest also though it is not a regular feature. Bentley carefully thought out the plot; and went to Paris to meet Chesterton who was in Paris then, to get his approval. The plot delighted Chesterton and that encouraged Bentley. That book is *Trent's last case* which Bentley dedicated to Chesterton. This work was appreciated for its startling originality, its good writing and good characters.45

Writing and reading of detective stories must

45) Dorothy Sayers in her Introduction to *Trent's Last Case*, pp. X-XII.
have been quite obviously, the favourite pastime of these men. Their involvement is a testimony to their addiction to the genre. Chesterton's art of writing detective stories came closer to the Wordsworthian poetic theory of self expression. He could express himself much better, clearer and effectively only in this particular genre for it came naturally to him.

**Flying Inn** (1914) is about the fight of the last inn keeper for his inn. Advocating 'teetotallism' is not in keeping with morality. Morality is persuasion and not a force or rather it is only a force when it is a persuasion. **Flying inn** stands for Chestertonian optimism. Chesterton's love of freedom is revealed in his words. The drunkard is a fool, a teetotal maniac is a criminal, while the temperate drinker is an example. The jolly journalist is at his appeal for freedom.  

The second collection of Father Brown stories - **The Wisdom of Father Brown** (1914) was dedicated to Lucian Oldershaw, the third of the childhood trio. **Crimes of England** (1915) elaborates on the real crimes of England. Chesterton's obsession with crime and detection sub-consciously influences his art.

46) John Stuart Mill's objection to prohibition is relevant here; Vide: *On Liberty.*
Chesterton analyses the pros and cons of the decline of the land where the sun never set.

The visit to America (1921) made him write the third collection of Father Brown stories, *The incredulity of Father Brown*, in America. He also published *Eugenics and other Evils* (1922) which structurally resembled *What's wrong with the world?* The Marconi* Scandal motivated another work called 'The Man who knew too much'. It has been called the first of his 'distributist' novels. It is not exactly a novel for it is a collection of interlocking short stories. The hero of the story is Horne Fisher who is a kind of political counterpart to Father Brown. This novel was published soon after his conversion to Catholicism. By then Chesterton had

*The Marconi Co. was authorized to erect a chain of stateowned wireless stations in England. It appears that there had been some shady dealing in the whole affair and some ministers were suspected to be involved. Cecil Chesterton wrote in his *Eye Witness* an article 'The Marconi Scandal' and attacked the whole deal. The matter went to the Court and Cecil Chesterton courageously attempted to expose the concerned public figures. But unfortunately Cecil lost the case and this affected G.K. Chesterton's private philosophy of life to a great extent.

developed an 'ethical' attitude towards everything. Here in this work he expresses his 'ethical' attitude towards political and economic realities. The novel does not end on a pessimistic note. It offers hope in the possibility of change of government.

Chesterton's bubbling enthusiasm suffered a serious setback at the death of his dear brother Cecil Chesterton. He took it upon himself to fulfil his dreams and aspirations and one such attempt was to run Cecil's paper along his line of thinking. Friends like G.B. Shaw advised him to give up overworking and also suggested that the policy of the paper be changed. Chesterton paid no heed. Profitable or unprofitable, he was sentimental about his paper. The physical and mental strains were caused by financial difficulties and Cecil's death. Chesterton's health was on the decline, his spirit and his art soon followed suit. But he was indefatigable. Father Brown stories came as an immense relief. When he ran short of money he wrote them. He could write these stories with the ease and poise of a professional gymnast.

_The Everlasting Man_ (1925) was his next major work. It is divided into two parts: the story of mankind and the coming of Christ. Right in the
middle of all these things stands up an enormous exception ... nothing less than the loud assertion 'that this mysterious maker of the world has visited his world in person'. 48 This was a public debate originally between Belloc and Wells over Wells' Outline of History. Belloc resented Wells' concept of Man's history as a progress from lowest degraded situation to a higher plane and also total dismissal of Roman and Greek civilizations. Wells gave vent to his hatred for Catholicism. Chesterton answers him in The Everlasting Man. He has no partisan attitude even when he is firm in his conviction.

The Return of Don Quixote (1926) is written to dispel the misconception about his return to medievalism. It is one of the most interesting novels of Chesterton. The post-world war conflict paints a gloomy picture but the universal panacea of Chesterton viz. Roman Catholicism is supposed to resolve it and promote happiness.

The Incredulity of Father Brown (1936) has many stories with American setting. The Secret of Father Brown appeared in 1937 expounding the secret of the success of Father Brown. Subsequently he wrote The

Judgement of Dr. Johnson, a play probably urged by Shaw. 1929 brought out another collection of detective short stories captioned The Poets and Lunatics: Gabriel Gale is a poet who plays the detective in these stories dealing with political crime. Four Faultless Felons appeared in 1930. The criminals were in fact heroes of modern life, dealing with crime and injustice including imperialism, industrialism and the Jewish question. The Resurrection of Rome and Come to think of it published in 1930 were again on his favourite topics. All I survey a collection of essays arrived in 1937. St. Francis of Assisi got a companion in St. Thomas Aquinas (1933). St. Thomas like St. Francis reaffirmed the Roman Catholic faith.

The Scandal of Father Brown (1935) the last of the Father Brown collections was put out before his tour to France and Spain. Dorothy Collins, his literary executrix remarks that Chesterton's chivalry could not be depended upon while he was reading a detective novel. It is as a perfect intoxicant to him; and he provides this intoxicant to his readers when he writes detective stories. "The Father Brown stories are still the most widely read of all Chesterton's writings, and the art form in which he
was most successful, in fact these stories may be his masterpiece.\(^49\)

Chesterton's health deteriorated and he became ill. He passed away in 1936 creating a vacuum in English authorship in general and in the realm of writing detective stories in particular.

G.K. Chesterton rescued detective fiction from the level of a mere literary genre and took it to a higher artistic level. To him crime and detection were not merely moral aberrations and legal consequence. Characteristically he said that 'the criminal is a creative artist and the detective is the critic'.\(^50\) In detective fiction the problem of good vs evil co-exists with the mechanics of crime and the logic of his discovery. Chesterton was equally preoccupied with both. He takes a sociological view of crime and detection. He says, "by dealing with the unsleeping sentinels who guard the outposts of society it tends to remind us that we live in an armed camp making war with a chaotic world", and "that the criminals, the children of chaos


are nothing but traitors within our gates"). Since to Chesterton detection of crime is an artistic endeavour, it is not necessary that the crime should be violent or invariably a crime of the order of murder. Thus among his stories the percentage involved in murder is not as high as is usual in sensational works.

G.K. Chesterton deserves the honour of innovating a new species of detective story - the sort where there is no crime, no criminal and a detective whose processes are transcendental. He commenced his experiment with A Club of Queer Trades, proceeded to The Man who was Thursday, then continued in The Man who knew Too much, the Poets and Lunatics, Four Faultless Felons, The Paradoxes of Mr. Pond and finally ended up in Father Brown. Chesterton's notion of crime was more social than legal. Basil Grant says "My criminals were tried for the faults which really make social life impossible. They were tried before me for selfishness, or for an impossible vanity or for scandal mongering or for stinginess to guests and dependents."


Conan Doyle produced Holmes, Chesterton produced 13 detectives. All these thirteen men practise transcendental detection. The author was working at a successful design to convey his spiritual message in an apparently unspiritual form. He had to wait for the birth of Father Brown in whom his art could find its consummation. It was not theology that he brought into this art but everything under the sun, the same subject matter that sparkled in his *The Tremendous Trifles*.

Chesterton was the first President of the Detection Club (1932) who laid down the rules and regulations for writing a detective story. He insisted on the seriousness of the artist's approach to the craft, for he knew that popular literature was one of the most potent forms of public address. It was naturally, and in fact, in this genre in which be made his lasting impression.\(^5^4\)

The moral dimensions of the detective story make it possible for a *philosophico-metaphysical*\(^5^5\) approach to the riddle of crime; what appeared 'trash' in the public eye became elevated because of the novel approach of Chesterton. He took active part in the

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social and political arena. He had extensively written on multifarious topics, but, in spite of all this he is essentially, fundamentally and sub-consciously a detective story writer. He knew only one art form and knew it well viz., that of posing a puzzle and solving it. Right from Napoleon of Notting Hill to The Paradoxes of Mr. Pond he had expressed his views by making mysteries of them and unravelling them which is the essence of the methodology of a detective story. Chesterton himself was as uncommonplace a person as lived in English literary society. He was the champion of the common man. He crusaded for the recognition of the virtues of the common man, not for the redress of his grievances. This last point differentiated G.K. Chesterton most from G.B. Shaw. Laying excessive emphasis on what is good in life is an indirect way of camouflaging what is wicked in life or distracting attention from it. Marx's call to philosophers to start reforming the world may be remembered here. G.K. Chesterton's optimism would not approve of this; for to him there was nothing wrong with the world.

Chesterton is not a novelist though he has a few novels to his credit. He was always at home with short stories. Two governing reasons are that first
he was a journalist and 'brevity is the soul of wit' for that profession. Secondly the psychology of the man: The rambling mind could not be imprisoned by discipline and regularity; and he instantly expressed them. His highly disorganized way of living could not give him the mental habit of brooding over a plot for a long time. All the detective stories embraced this short story form and it would be proper to call him one of the best detective short story writers.

Chesterton was a walking legend of laughter and enthusiasm. He possessed a matchless self-confidence that always cherished optimistic views on life.

"Some sneer; some snigger, some simper
In the youth where we laughed and sang
And they may end with a whimper
But, we will end with a bang".56

This born detective story writer was brought up amidst the thrill of reading detective stories. When he grew up he formulated his own values on life on the basis of the moral dimensions of detective novels. He practised the art and died a consummate detective story writer.

56) G.K.Chesterton, The Listener, March 18, 1936.