

DON'T

THINGS I AM TIRED OF

It is hoped by many, including myself, that I shall soon leave off arguing about evolution and such dusty Victorian conventions, and devote my few remaining days to writing Penny Dreadfuls; a noble and much-needed work (writes Mr. G. K. Chesterton). But before I finally desert the illusions of rationalism for the actualities of romance, I should very much like to write one last roaring, raging book telling all the rationalists not to be so utterly irrational. The book would be simply a string of violent vetoes, like the Ten Commandments. I would call it 'Don'ts for Dogmatists; or Things I am Tired Of.'

This book of intellectual etiquette, like most books of etiquette, would begin with superficial things; but there would be, I fancy, a wailing imprecation in the words that could not be called artificial; it might begin thus:

(1) Don't use a noun and then an adjective that crosses out the noun. An adjective qualifies, it cannot contradict. Don't say 'Give me a patriotism that is free from all boundaries.' It is like saying 'Give me a pork pie with no pork in it.' Don't say 'I look forward to that larger religion that shall have no special dogmas.' It is like saying 'I look forward to that larger quadruped who shall have no feet.' A quadruped means something with four feet; and a religion means something that commits a man to some doctrine about the universe. Don't let the meek substantive be absolutely murdered by the joyful, exuberant adjective.

(2) Don't say you are not going to say a thing, and then say it. This practice is very flourishing and successful with public speakers. The trick consists of first repudiating a certain view in unfavorable terms, and then repeating the same view in favorable terms. Perhaps the simplest form of it may be found in a landlord of my neighborhood, who said to his tenants in an election speech, 'Of course I'm not going to threaten you, but if this Budget passes the rents will go up.' The thing can be done in many forms besides this. 'I am the last man to mention party politics; but when I see the Empire rent in pieces by irresponsible Radicals,' etc.

'In this hall we welcome all creeds. We have no hostility against any honest belief; but only against that black priestcraft and superstition which can accept such a doctrine as,' etc. 'I would not say one word that could ruffle our relations with Germany. But this I will say, that when I see ceaseless and unscrupulous armament,' etc. Please don't do it. Decide to make a remark or not to make a remark. But don't fancy that you have somehow softened the saying of a thing by having just promised not to say it.

(3) Don't use secondary words as primary words. 'Happiness' (let us say) is a primary word. You know when you have the thing, and you jolly well know when you haven't. 'Progress' is a secondary word; it means the degree of one's approach to happiness, or to some such solid ideal. But modern controversies constantly turn on asking, 'Does Happiness help Progress?' Thus, I see in the *New Age* a letter from Mr. Egerton Swann, in which he warns the world against me and my friend Mr. Belloc on the ground that our democracy is 'spasmodic' (whatever that means) while our 'reactionism is settled and permanent.' It never strikes Mr. Swann that democracy means something in itself; while 'reactionism' means nothing except in connection with democracy. You cannot react except from something. If Mr. Swann thinks I have ever reacted from the doctrine that the people should rule, wish he would give me the reference.

(4) Don't say 'There is no true creed; for each creed believes itself right and the others wrong.' Probably one of the creeds is right and the others are wrong. Diversity does show that most of the views must be wrong. It does not by the faintest logic show that they all must be wrong. I suppose there is no subject on which opinions differ with more desperate sincerity than about which horse will win the Derby. These are certainly solemn convictions; men risk ruin for them. The man who puts his shirt on Potosi must believe in that animal, and each of other men putting their last garments upon other quadrupeds must believe in them quite as sincerely. They are all serious, and most of them are wrong. But one of them is right. One of the faiths is justified; one of the horses does win; not always even the dark horse which might stand for Agnosticism, but often the obvious and popular horse of Orthodoxy. Democracy has its occasional victories; and even the Favorite has been known to come in first.

But the point here is that something comes in first. That there were many beliefs does not destroy the fact that there was no well-founded belief. I believe (merely upon authority) that the world is round. That there may be tribes who believe it to be triangular or oblong does not alter the fact that it is certainly some shape, and therefore not any other shape. Therefore I repeat, with the wail of imprecation, don't say that the variety of creeds prevents you from accepting any creed. It is an unintelligent remark.

(5) Don't (if anyone calls your doctrine mad, which is likely enough), don't answer that madmen are only the minority and the sane only the majority. The sane are sane

because they are the corporate substance of mankind; the insane are not a minority because they are not a mob. The man who thinks himself a man thinks the next man a man; he reckons his neighbor as himself. But the man who thinks he is a chicken does not try to look through the man who thinks he is glass. The insane cannot combine . . . but surely this article is getting much too long. I apologise. I beg your pardon. I thought I was writing a book.

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