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A NON-PARTISAN MAGAZINE OF FREE DISCUSSION.
IT AIMS TO INTERPRET THE NEW AMERICA THAT
IS ATTAINING CONSCIOUSNESS IN THIS DECADE.
THE FORUM GIVES BOTH SIDES. WHATEVER IS
ATTACKED BY CONTRIBUTORS THIS MONTH MAY
BE PRAISED IN LATER ISSUES

THE INTERNATIONAL IRRITANT

G. K. CHESTERTON

IN considering the misunderstandings that lead to quarrels between nations, it will be well to realize first that there are some quarrels which are not misunderstandings. There is such a thing as real disagreement; and disagreement is not misunderstanding. It is understanding. There is no doubt that the Kaisers and the Czars did wish to dismember and destroy Poland; they desired to do it and they did it. A Pole who was also a patriot was not involved in any sort of misunderstanding with Prussia or Russia. He fully understood them, and he fought them because he fully understood them. It will be well to remember that situations of this sort are perfectly possible; because abominable crimes are always perfectly possible. A man does not say he has had a misunderstanding with a murderer in a dark lane; he understands and enters into and (I had almost said) sympathizes with the full mind of the murderer even in calling him a murderer. The sort of pacifist who imagines that international quarrels of this understanding sort are henceforth impossible is something much worse than a sentimentalist; he is a snob who supposes that crimes can be committed by poor men in dark lanes, but not by princes and premiers in high places.

But murder on the whole is rare, even in the highest political

circles. And of the other differences that arise between peoples, a large number may truly be called misunderstandings. It is obvious that we must have a certain amount of sympathy with men to understand how they misunderstand. What is not perhaps quite so obvious, what is anyhow not so much observed, is that we must have some sympathy with the nations as nations, as well as with the men as men. It is not only true that we must be human in order to reconcile human beings. It is also true that we must be national in order to reconcile nationalists. This accounts for the common or comparative failure of nearly all internationalists. Instead of being like householders complaining of the house shortage or protesting against people being turned out of their houses, they become like mere gypsies or tramps, telling all men to become homeless and come and live together on a heath. A man who likes to choose his own wall paper will understand the same desire in another, even if the first wall paper is pale blue with pink cherubs and the second is scarlet more brightly varied with skulls and crossbones. But neither will be happy for very long sitting on the cold ground and listening to a lecturer who is so convinced that there should be no wall papers that he infers there should be no walls. If we are to remove misunderstanding, we must begin with understanding; with understanding of how tastes differ and why wall papers vary, and how it is that a man likes to be master in his own house. The world, in my view, is much better for such variety; but the variety does lead to many falsifications and fables and rumors; and it will be well to put them right where we can. But though liberty leads to variety, and variety leads to controversy, the curious thing is that one of the worst sorts of misunderstandings generally arises when two things are very much alike.

What commonly bewilders a man about a foreign country is not finding a thing where he is accustomed to find it. He is rather more bewildered when he finds the same thing somewhere else. So a man might live fifty years in a seaport and see the sea from every window and even on every side; and yet be none the less surprised to visit Venice and find the sea in the street. An intelligent Italian, visiting London, said he liked nearly everything there except the dirt and the beggars. He was quite surprised when he was told that this was exactly what many intelligent Londoners say on visiting Italy. But he was perfectly right. He saw something in London which Londoners do not see because

they are always seeing it. By "dirt" he did not mean the dirt of such people as chose to be dirty, as in the social liberties of his own sunny land. He meant the dirt of *everything*, of things that nobody wants to be dirty, of white marble statues or baskets of flowers, or all the things that would sparkle spotlessly under an Italian sky. And by "beggars" he meant what we call touts; not honest beggars where beggars ought to be, asking alms avowedly for the love of God in the charitable shadow of the Church. He meant men who pretend to open cab doors and don't, or hover round expecting something for doing nothing — that is, at least, how the Italian felt about it. In other words, the Italian really felt exactly as the Englishman felt. Each of them felt he could put up with dirt where he was accustomed to dirt and with beggars where he was accustomed to beggars. Dirt, as the philosopher said, is only matter in the wrong place. This man wanted to have it (so to speak) in the "right" wrong place.

I once talked to a fellow countryman inside a French restaurant. He was very indignant because the Frenchmen would not allow him to open a window; and he snorted scornfully and said that the whole nation hated the open air. I said to him very mildly, "That being so, is it not singular that most of them are having their lunch in the street outside?" Now it never occurred to that man, when walking down Piccadilly or the Strand, to say, "None of these restaurants have got any seats outside, so that people who like the open air can lunch in it." He did not miss French fresh air in London. He only missed English fresh air in Paris. And almost all minor misunderstandings between nations are of that sort. They both really like the same thing, but they like much more the long ease and familiarity of their own way of getting it. In this matter of fresh air alone, for instance, there is a danger of a still more serious misunderstanding between England and America. Englishmen do not understand that in this sense there is no such thing in America as mere air. There is cold air and hot air; I use the term with no symbolical intention. To put the matter another way, Englishmen have never experienced any such thing as summer and winter. They have only experienced weather; and they grumble at that. But both peoples would like to moderate heat and cold to a reasonable extent; only the heat and cold they have to moderate are things totally different, like the atmospheres of different planets. And this, which is true of obvious material things like cold and heat, is equally true of the moral things that

determine politics and social life. It is not so much a difference between black and white, as the difference felt by a man who finds black where he is used to white and white where he has always expected black.

The immediate moral from this may be stated roughly thus: whenever we find ourselves criticizing a foreign state, we should make the experiment of saying, not "Do I do this precise thing?" but "In what form do I do what is practically the same thing?" It is a hundred to one that we shall find that we do do it in some form. But all this involves an attitude in moral matters which is very much misunderstood because it is almost invariably misstated. We hear a great deal about international amity being truly Christian; which is commonly accepted merely in the sense of "altruistic." I happen myself to hold a type of Christian belief that has always made itself unpleasant (to many people) by insisting on altruism taking the practical and sometimes painful form of humility. And I do believe that in this question is the key to the whole of that international evil, which some call the failure of Christianity, but which I should call the failure of those who chose to break up Christianity.

What humanity hates is not hatred; at least it is not the mere accidental hatred we have for this or that enemy. What humanity hates is pride; or praise of ourselves uttered as if everything about us was praiseworthy. Men could easily forgive us for having believed that our foes were as black as they were painted; but not for continuing to believe that we ourselves were as white as we were white-washed. And we were not. Whether we are English or American or German or any other historical human beings, we most certainly were not. To judge by much of the international and idealistic rhetoric that surrounds this subject, one would imagine that people were always wicked when they quarreled and always good when they praised. One would almost deduce the absurd doctrine that it is always Christian to speak well of things and unchristian to speak ill of them. At the risk of an apparent perversity, I will assert the contrary. It is much more likely that people are right in cursing foreigners than that they are right in blessing themselves as utterly blameless beings. Their fury at the profligate private life of the Prince of Polybia or the gross oppression of the Jub-Jubs by the Jam-Jam of Jugga may really be an innocent indignation. Their conviction of their own complete innocence can never be completely innocent. Nay, if once this

moral superiority is broken down, this moral indignation may really be a valuable force. Something may really be done on the day that an Englishman can say heartily and with warmth, "The Jam-Jam is oppressing the Jub-Jubs as abominably as we oppressed the Irish," or an American can say, "The corruption at the court of Polybia is as bad as the Oil Trust." Lest I be accused in my turn of preaching a pompous morality it is impossible to practice, I will say that I have tried to practice it, though I dare say with very indifferent success. When I wrote against a Sultan or a Kaiser, I have tried to remember Denshawi and the story of Sergeant Sheridan; and the book I wrote against Prussia in the crisis of the War bore the title of *The Crimes of England*. But though this ideal is as difficult for me as for everybody else, I am quite sure it is the right ideal. And the trouble with most of the idealists is that they are following the wrong ideal. Theirs is humanitarianism and a silence about all sins; ours is humility and a candor about our own.

I will take a recent example merely because it is recent; and is, thank God, about the nearest approach to an Anglo-American misunderstanding that has been popularly recognized of late. A great deal has been said, unfavorable as well as favorable, in America as well as England, about the patriotic outburst of Mr. Thompson of Chicago. As everybody knows, he said that the Anglo-American story was taught in American schools with a bias in favor of England. I do not know to what he was referring. I can only say that if the story has an English bias in American schools, it is more than it has in English schools. One of the quaintest of the curiosities of history is the fact that, on that one subject, English historians might almost as well be American historians, so warmly do they state all that could be said for George Washington and so little do they state all that could be said for George III. I do not boast of this either; it was due to bad causes as well as good; partly to the excessive power of the Whig aristocracy, which sympathized with the Colonists; partly to a troublesome myth invented later about the Anglo-Saxon race. But anyhow English history was almost as much biased in favor of its American enemies as against its French enemies. And as the two were allies, it is all the funnier. But perhaps Mr. Thompson may be referring to some more modern matters of which I am ignorant. The particular thing that interests me in his case is something else.

It is roughly this. Many Americans as well as most Englishmen

would perhaps decline to defend him. But one thing about him that I should be inclined to defend is the one thing that seems to have been considered indefensible. It involves, indeed, an amusing case of the difficulties of this international candor and humor and humility. The one thing I really like about Mr. Thompson is that he said, to the general horror of all around, that we had to teach the young patriotism rather than truth. Then followed a typical comedy. While most Englishmen shrieked with disgust and derision, one Englishman saw the point. He was the very able journalist who writes under the name of "Beachcomber" in the *Daily Express*; and he said that all English young people were already taught patriotism rather than truth; so we needn't quarrel about that. He was immediately bombarded with correspondence from his countrymen, reproaching and reviling him for saying such a shocking thing about our noble English schools.

That illustrates how difficult it is to start this sort of mutual confession and common sense. Now of course "Beachcomber" was quite right; in a sense Mr. Thompson was quite right; in a sense the English schools are quite right. The thing is not rightly stated; but that is because all modern moral philosophy has gone to pieces. It would be truer to say, "Certain moral truths are a part of primary education and patriotism is one of them. Certain technical truths are a part of secondary education and historical accuracy is one of them." But, roughly speaking, we can accept Mr. Thompson's statement in principle; and there is no doubt whatever that we do accept it in practice. When I was a boy, I am very glad to say, I was taught any number of patriotic poems; even before I learnt anything, let alone the truth, about the events on which they were founded. But this is perfectly sound morality; even universal morality and Christian morality. The first thing to teach a human being is the nature of certain human relations and emotions without which he is not human. His life begins with a social introduction to a lady called a mother, and not with a book on matriarchy or marriage customs; and unless that relation is right, nothing else is right. In the same way the impulse which cries, "Let us praise famous men and our fathers that begat us," the song of the nurse about the land and its heroes, comes quite rightly before the teaching of any sciences, including history.

I do not think I was greatly deceived because my parents pointed to the statue of Nelson and said, "That is the greatest of our sailors; he fought gloriously for England and died in the hour

of triumph," or because they did not say to a child of five, "That is the man who broke his word because he was bullied by his mistress (who was another man's wife) and hanged a lot of honest men who were prisoners of war in Naples." That is knowledge quite proper to a grown man; I am now a grown man and I know it; what is perhaps not so inevitable or universal, I say it. But it does not prevent my admiring the heroism of Nelson; and it certainly would not prevent me from presenting him to children as a hero. He was in fact a very heroic hero; but there are some things to be said about him when we have the direct purpose of arousing hero-worship, others when we are closely studying not a hero but a man. I am very glad I learnt the ringing war songs of Campbell; like that with the spirited opening:

Of Nelson and the North
Sing the glorious day's renown
When to battle fierce came forth
All the might of Denmark's crown.

And it can still stir me, though I am perfectly well aware that few episodes in English history were so discreditable as the pressure put upon Denmark round about the time of the revolutionary wars. But that was not Campbell's fault; and it was not Nelson's fault; and it was not the fault of my parents or schoolmasters. And I am not such a prig as to propose that Campbell's poem should be rewritten for children with scientific correction and amplification, in the *vers libre* manner:

Of Nelson and the North
Sing the somewhat dubious diplomatic conduct, not unconnected with
some reasonable maritime renown,
When to a battle more or less unjustly forced upon them came forth
All the insufficient forces at the command of Denmark's crown.

I do not think that is the right way to sing songs to children; nor do I think it is the right way to teach history to grown-up people. I should like the two things kept separate; the former avowedly patriotic and only the latter avowedly prosaic. I would teach a child a song about the beauty of daisies or dandelions before I taught him the botany of them; and I would not mix up the two. In this sense, I think Mr. Thompson perfectly right, exactly where he has been denounced as particularly wrong. But certainly if English schoolmasters say such patriotism has not been the primary education of English schools, they are utterly and flatly wrong. Perhaps they do not tell these stories against England

because they have never heard them. That only shows that their patriotic education has been very thorough indeed.

Now unfortunately the usual way of trying to avoid a quarrel between one nation and another, and especially between England and America, does not consist of this mutual confession of human weakness. It consists rather of a sort of patronizing expansion of pride. It consists of saying: "I hold this intelligent, idealistic, humane and high-minded view; and it is so manifestly superior that you, I am sure, will be only too ready to share it." So some Englishmen assume that Mr. Thompson must be considered a fool even in America, merely because he spoke against England. So some Americans not only talk as if they had a moral mission to purify the world, but seem to entertain the extraordinary notion that the world would regard prohibition as a form of purification. In other words, instead of saying, "Let us both confess our sins," each is saying, "Come you, and share my virtues." That is, I most firmly believe, the essential poison in almost all international irritations. It is spiritual pride: a thing far more venomous than spite.

We can all humorously reconcile ourselves to being shut out by the foreigner's necessity of exclusiveness. But the Lord deliver us from being included in the foreigner's notion of fraternity. He has a right to exclude us, but he has no right to include us; no more right than he has to conquer and enslave us. And so, in the moral and metaphysical sphere, he has no right to generalize about us; or include us in his universality, which is quite different from our universality. Nor have we any right to include him in our own equally universal generalization. That sort of intellectual imperialism has done far more harm than the most narrow nationalism. We can respect the zealot who died fighting in the narrow entrance to the Holy Place; he is far less offensive than the Pharisee who not only makes broad his phylactery, but also makes broad his mind. It is that narrow notion of breadth that is the chief danger to the real brotherhood of men. An international version of nationalism might perhaps have really marked out the rights of nations. But a national version of internationalism is the worst of all misunderstandings. It leads to a reaction and revolt in all healthy people of all countries. In a word, foreigners can forgive our vice; what they cannot forgive is our virtue. The instinct is so profoundly Christian, that so long as men feel like that, we cannot say that Christianity has been without effect.

AL SMITH AND A CATHOLIC PARTY — A THREE-CORNERED DEBATE

"Will there be a Catholic party in America?" asks Mr. Stanley Frost, Washington journalist, and answers that the political situation indicates that there will. American Catholics, he says, are disposed to make Governor Smith's candidacy a test case to see whether the highest office in the land can be withheld from an able man merely because he pays spiritual allegiance to the Pope. Mr. Frost thinks Governor Smith's chances of election are remote, for reasons other than his religion; but he says Catholics will be only too ready to interpret his defeat solely in religious terms. They will therefore be in a mood to form a Catholic party to demand the recognition which they will believe they cannot secure within the ranks of existing parties. The direful consequences of such a move Mr. Frost describes in no uncertain terms.

Mr. Michael Williams, who, as editor of the COMMONWEAL, is an authoritative spokesman for American Catholics, describes this idea as fantastic. He says Catholics are the most difficult of all people to organize for other than religious purposes. The Vatican, moreover, looks with ill favor upon the formation of Catholic political parties.

Mr. William Bennett Munro, as Professor of Government at Harvard University, considers the formation of a Catholic party unlikely on practical grounds. Catholics, he says, have less of a grievance than scores of other minority groups in America. Besides, American politics function along state lines, and though Catholics form a healthy leaven throughout the country as a whole, they are not strong enough in the separate states to make an impression in the electoral college.

I — WILL THERE BE A CATHOLIC PARTY?

STANLEY FROST

EVEN before the doors are opened for the Democratic Convention in Houston, it has become certain that the most vital issue of this year's campaign, as it will affect the future of the country, will be fought out inside the party, rather than between it and the Republicans. That issue is: What will the party do — what on earth *can* it do — with the Catholic question? This question has driven the two irreconcilable Democratic factions farther apart than ever, and the long-expected disruption of the party therefore seems imminent. The importance of this crisis has only recently become clear with the sudden appearance