

THE HERETIC AND THE HOME VISITOR

BY G. K. CHESTERTON

AN eloquent lady, one of the leaders of the Feminist movement, asked in thrilling tones the other day whether we were not all interested in the great cause of the humanization of women. To which the answer is that we are not; and it is possible that we preserve an equally detached attitude toward the doggifying of dogs, the elephantification of elephants, the gilding of gold, the painting of lilies, the transport of coals to Newcastle, and of water to the sea. Some of us have fancied that we could trace, even in the twilight time before the war, hints of something strangely human in the female appearance; an almost human look in the eyes, such as is so pathetic in the dog, or that almost automatic mimicry in the gestures which is so entertaining in the monkey. To these the humanization of women will come with less of a shock than it does to the leaders of the woman's movement; especially the lady who dignified and glorified her sex by the remarkable phrase I have quoted. But without going all lengths with that lady, I should be prepared to propose a compromise; in the form of a prayer for the humanization of some women. I will join in the suggestion of the poet to Lady Clara Vere de Vere, that she should pray heaven for a human heart; but not in his social programme for procuring one. For it is my experience that Lady Clara is far more inhuman when she is teaching the orphan girl to sew, than when she is humanly flirting with the foolish yeoman. And I am much more inclined to forgive her for the drifting

irresponsibility of her relations with the young suicide (who at least had a mother to look after him) than for the deliberate insolence of the educational attitude which I fear she afterwards adopted toward the orphan boy when she was teaching him to read, and, only too probably, to read rubbish. In a sense, indeed, the whole of our modern social history took the wrong turning on that dreadful day, when Clara Vere de Vere took the advice of Tennyson.

It is especially, of course, the health visitors and baby welfare workers, now being discussed in a correspondence in the *New Statesman*, whom I should like to see restored to the human shape. But it is a mistake, though a common mistake, to suppose that the reform required is merely emotional, or what our opponents would call merely sentimental. We do not merely urge the health visitor to pray heaven for a human heart. We urge her, with yet more earnest gestures of entreaty, to pray heaven for a human head. When she writes such a letter, for instance, as that which appeared in the *New Statesman* signed H. D. Player, it is only my secondary or subsequent feeling that she would be improved by a little human charity or humility. It is rather the attribute of the human reason which I wish, in the first instance, to see added to her social gifts. It is that mysterious quality, really distinguishing us from monkeys and dogs, the rational power, which seems needed. I regret that such active social workers, as a class, are always ready to take any

trouble so long as they are spared the trouble of thinking. While they have far too many plans and patterns in their practical arrangements, they always start thinking, or rather guessing and groping, without any plan whatever. And the proof of it is printed in their letters and articles; for they can never offer anything except strings of random and motley examples, small and big, important and unimportant, probable and improbable, of points on which they happen to disagree with poor parents about the management of their homes. Now anybody who likes to know where he is going, anyone who has the controversial map in his mind, knows that such a road leads downward and never ends. It is obvious that anybody at any time could suggest infinite shades of alteration in anybody else's family, as in anybody else's face. Both are cases of a balance of features or influences, about which tastes differ interminably. It is said that science has been doing wonderful work in the making of artificial faces; and it is already suggested that science should make artificial families.

Eugenists are playing the old game of matchmaking, purged of its more generous motives; but even a Eugenist cannot be such a fool as not to see that matchmaking is a matter of taste. Hitherto there has been a feeling that the family, like the face, had a right to find its own balance or be content with its own compromise. There has been a delicacy, in discussion with any gentleman, about the forcible alteration of his features, or even about any direct discussion or eager planning of any far-reaching reforms; any criticism on his face to his face. The too animated analysis of Mr. Brown's whiskers, in Mr. Brown's presence, is still thought uncivilized. Some hold that a woman may perhaps feel as much delicacy

about her unique privilege of having a baby as a man about his unique privilege of growing a beard. But it is not such sentimental fancies that concern me here, but the simple fact that such criticism and modification must be endless. Every family among our friends and equals offers examples, often extreme examples, of things that we ourselves should do very differently. The logical process, if it be logical, must end in all middle-class people interfering with each other; in the Robinsons agitating against a child so excitable as little Tomkins sitting up to a champagne supper, and the Tomkineses preventing a boy so nervous as young Robinson from being sent into the navy. But the logical process will not be logical. It will not be carried out; for the perfectly simple reason that the supper is a champagne supper and that the naval career is that of a naval officer. The reason is snobbishness; and no man can suggest any other.

I will put a plain case and a clear challenge to those who deny that such a social reform is merely a snobbish reform. A mother of children, the wife of a great land-owner, told me with her own lips that she was, or was going to be, a Christian Scientist. She gave as her reason a conviction that the Christian Scientists were more purely spiritual than other people. When I made the obvious reply that even they could not be so purely spiritual as Satan, she laughed and seemed to entertain the extraordinary idea that it was a joke. That, however, is not the aspect of the matter which affects the point, which is this. Here is the whole huge apparatus of a Health Ministry, here is a vast machinery of medical intervention, inspection, and warning, armies of medical officers and health visitors sent out, if only to instruct and advise; and all on the

possibility that people are not taking proper medical precautions or listening to proper medical counsel. And here is a woman who declares in two plain words that she will take no medical precautions; that she will listen to no medical counsel; that she will disregard all recognized rules of health; not occasionally and by accident, but, invariably, persistently and on principle. Even if the Health Ministry only existed to instruct, would not this be a case for instruction? Even if the 'home visitors' are only to persuade, is not this a home they ought to visit? And will anyone tell me at what time a 'home visitor' visited that great country house, in the middle of that great country estate, passed through the lodge gates and up the long elaborate avenue, penetrated the hierarchy of servants, and told the lady of the house that there was some reason to suppose that she was neglecting the medical side of 'mother-craft'? Would any of them do it, if the lady mentioned to-morrow in some magazine controversy or public speech (as she very possibly may) that she is a Christian Scientist? Would they do it then, though in effect she would have hung a notice on the lodge gates, and put a placard on the front door, saying 'I take no medical care of my children whatever'? I do not maintain their right to do so, for I think other things are involved for rich and poor alike; I do not even say that she would in practice prove a bad mother. Indeed, I think it most likely that she would, in fact, fall back on being a good mother by being a bad Christian Scientist. But that is because I have that romantic faith in motherhood, which is so earnestly

rebuked; and hold that the rudiment of common sense, which I believe to survive the ravages of poverty, can even survive the ravages of wealth. But for the health visitor there is no escape; he (or she) must pass trembling through the lodge gates and up the long avenue. It is impossible to imagine any case where there is clearer reason to *suspect* that hygienic rules are being disregarded, than a case of a divinely inspired dogma by which they are flatly denied. There cannot conceivably be *any* case in which such negligence should be anticipated, if not in a case in which it is actually announced.

But the important point about such social reformers is not merely that they are crafty; it is that they are, in the most exact sense of the word, unprincipled. They have no principle, even of their own, about the rights of a home, or even about the rights of the home visitor. They merely nibble away like mice, and are as ignorant as mice both of the substance and the ownership of all they destroy. Some of them do it more gently than others; some of them, rather alarmed at the cruder confessions of 'H. D. Player,' have already begun to say that of course the thing must be done with tact and sympathy. It will be generally agreed that tact is a very necessary virtue in the profession of the spy, in international or internal affairs.

But the question we ask the international spy concerns not his social manner, but his social status. We want to know what is his *locus standi* in our country; and a similar question is not inconceivable concerning our house.

SLEEPING HEROES

BY LOUISE F. FIELD

THE legend of the Sleeping Hero is common to many countries. One might suppose it to be one of those superstitions which advancing civilization leaves behind, but that we find it realized afresh in the continued refusal of some people to-day to believe in Lord Kitchener's death. No doubt the idea is intertwined with the very fabric of the human heart that there are natures too fine for failure. Of them, at least, the old question: 'Why hast Thou made all men for naught?' should not be asked. If clouds obscured their setting, poetical justice demands a new dawn; the world has a right to their service.

So long as fairyland was recognized as a 'something between heaven and hell,' the valley of Achor had its door of hope. Even the Catholic Church once gave her sanction to belief in a hero's return. Prayers were said for centuries at Grenoble, that the Chevalier Bayard might be allowed to come back before the general resurrection, so that the world might be trained in the principles and practice of chivalry. The fact is interesting also as an authoritative pronouncement that Catholicism did not see in the spirit of chivalry the spirit of Antichrist.

The sleeping hero seems to differ from the sublimated beings whom the pagan invoked as demi-gods and the mediæval churchman as saints. The Roman was 'aware of a stately pair' when Castor and Pollux were seen heading his phalanx, and the Spaniard — despite the statement of certain modern historians that the battle itself

is mythical — holds to this day the belief that once, at least, St. James on a white horse turned defeat into victory for his country. But these glorified personages vanished as they came, while the hero was to return 'in the face and the form that we knew.' Scholars may see in the Red Indian Hiawatha a Western Adonis whose marriage with the Laughing Water meant fertility for the soil. But the myth probably floated in the air till attached to the story of a too-mortal chief, who should return from happy hunting-grounds in a winged canoe such as brought Pale-faces from the Sunrise. He it was who should then teach the arts of peace that avert famine, while, as of old, leading his tribe to war and protecting their village and their hunting.

In this, as in all the legends, it is some supreme day of national crisis that is to rouse the sleeping hero. The world's Armageddon should surely have given back one leader, at least, to every combatant nation. Serbia, for instance, could hardly wait for a darker hour than that of her recent devastation to recall Marco Kraljevic (King's son), whom legend declared to have survived the grim day of Kossovo. King Vukasin, his father, fell at the Marica, in 1371, after long war with the Turk, and Marco continued the struggle till that seemingly final defeat. Then despair seized upon him as upon the dying Roland. He cast his mace into the sea, and drove his sword into the living rock, where it has been guarded ever since by his adopted