

THE REPUBLICAN IN THE RUINS

BY G. K. CHESTERTON

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IN one respect America is more historic than England; I might almost say more archæological than England. The record of one period of the past, morally remote and probably irrevocable, is there preserved in a more perfect form, as a pagan city is preserved at Pompeii. In a more general sense, of course, it is easy to exaggerate the contrast, as a mere contrast, between the old world and the new. There is a superficial satire about the millionaire's daughter who has recently become the wife of an aristocrat; but there is a rather more subtle satire in the question how long the aristocrat has been aristocratic. There is often much misplaced mockery of a marriage between an upstart's daughter and a decayed relic of feudalism; when it is really a marriage between an upstart's daughter and an upstart's grandson. The sentimental Socialist often seems to admit the blue blood of the nobleman — even when he wants to shed it; just as he seems to admit the marvelous brains of the millionaire, even when he wants to blow them out. Unfortunately, in the interests of social science, of course, the sentimental Socialist never does go so far as bloodshed or blowing out brains; otherwise the color and quality of both blood and brains would probably be a disappointment to him.

There are certainly more American families that really came over in the Mayflower than English families that really came over with the Conqueror; and an English county family clearly dating from the time of the Mayflower

would be considered a very traditional and historic house. Nevertheless, there are ancient things in England, though the aristocracy is hardly one of them. There are buildings, there are institutions, there are even ideas in England which do preserve, as in a perfect pattern, some particular epoch of the past, and even of the remote past. A man could study the Middle Ages in Lincoln as well as in Rouen; in Canterbury as well as in Cologne. Even of the Renaissance the same is true, at least, on the literary side; if Shakespeare was later he was also greater than Ronsard. But the point is that the spirit and philosophy of the periods were present in fullness and in freedom. The guildsmen were as Christian in England as they were anywhere; the poets were as pagan in England as they were anywhere. Personally I do not admit that the men who served patrons were freer than those who served patron saints. But each fashion had its own kind of freedom; and the point is that the English, in each case, had the fullness of that kind of freedom. But there was another ideal of freedom which the English never had at all; or, anyhow, never expressed at all. There was another ideal, the soul of another epoch, round which we built no monuments and wrote no masterpieces. You will find no traces of it in England; but you will find them in America.

The thing I mean was the real religion of the eighteenth century. Its religion, in the more defined sense, was generally Deism, as in Robespierre or

Jefferson. In the more general way of morals and atmosphere it was rather Stoicism, as in the suicide of Wolfe Tone. It had certain very noble and, as some would say, impossible ideals; as that a politician should be poor, and should be proud of being poor. It knew Latin; and therefore insisted on the strange fancy that the Republic should be a public thing. Its republican simplicity was anything but a silly pose; unless all martyrdom is a silly pose. Even of the prigs and fanatics of the American and French revolutions we can often say, as Stevenson said of an American, that 'thrif and courage glowed in him.' And its virtue and value for us is that it did remember the things we now most tend to forget; from the dignity of liberty to the danger of luxury. It did really believe in self-determination, in the self-determination of the self, as well as of the state. And its determination was really determined. In short, it believed in self-respect; and it is strictly true, even of its rebels and regicides, that they desired chiefly to be respectable.

But there were in it the marks of religion as well as respectability: it had a creed; it had a crusade. Men died singing its songs; men starved rather than write against its principles. And its principles were liberty, equality, and fraternity, or the dogmas of the Declaration of Independence. This was the idea that redeemed the dreary negations of the eighteenth century; and there are still corners of Philadelphia or Boston or Baltimore where we can feel so suddenly in the silence its plain garb and formal manners, that the walking ghost of Jefferson would hardly surprise us.

There is not the ghost of such a thing in England. In England the real religion of the eighteenth century never found freedom or scope. It never cleared a space in which to build that

cold and classic building called the Capitol. It never made elbow-room for that free, if sometimes frigid, figure called the Citizen.

In eighteenth-century England he was crowded out, partly perhaps by the relics of better things of the past, but largely at least by the presence of much worse things in the present. The worst things kept out the best things of the eighteenth century. The ground was occupied by legal fictions; by a godless Erastian church and a powerless Hanoverian king. Its realities were an aristocracy of Regency dandies, in costumes made to match Brighton Pavilion; a paganism not frigid, but florid. It was a touch of this aristocratic waste in Fox that prevented that great man from being a glorious exception. It is therefore well for us to realize that there is something in history which we did not experience; and therefore probably something in Americans that we do not understand. There was this idealism at the very beginning of their individualism. There was a note of heroic publicity and honorable poverty which lingers in the very name of Cincinnati.

But I have another and special reason for noting this historical fact; the fact that we English never made anything upon the model of a Capitol, while we can match anybody with the model of a cathedral. It is far from impossible that the latter model may again be a working model. For I have myself felt naturally and for a long time, a warm sympathy with both those past ideals, which seem to some so incompatible. I have felt the attraction of the red cap as well as the red cross, of the Marseillaise as well as the Magnificat. And even when they were in furious conflict, I have never altogether lost my sympathy for either. But in the conflict between the Republic and the Church, the point often made against the Church seems to me much more of a point

against the Republic. It is emphatically the Republic and not the Church that I venerate, as something beautiful but belonging to the past. In fact, I feel exactly the same sort of sad respect for the republican ideal that many mid-Victorian free-thinkers felt for the religious ideal. The most sincere poets of that period were largely divided between those who insisted, like Arnold and Clough, that Christianity might be a ruin, but after all it must be treated as a picturesque ruin; and those, like Swinburne, who insisted that it might be a picturesque ruin, but after all it must be treated as a ruin. But surely their own pagan temple of political liberty is now much more of a ruin than the other; and I fancy I am one of the few who still take off their hats in that ruined temple. That is why I went about looking for the fading traces of that lost cause, in the old-world atmosphere of the new world.

But I do not, as a fact, feel that the cathedral is a ruin; I doubt if I should feel it even if I wished to lay it in ruins. I doubt if Mr. McCabe really thinks that Catholicism is dying, though he might deceive himself into saying so. Nobody could be naturally moved to say that the crowded Cathedral of St. Patrick in New York was a ruin, or even that the unfinished Anglo-Catholic cathedral at Washington was a ruin, though it is not yet a church; or that there is anything lost or lingering about the splendid and spirited Gothic churches springing up under the inspiration of Mr. Cram of Boston. As a matter of feeling, as a matter of fact, as a matter quite apart from theory or opinion, it is not in the religious centres that we now have the feeling of something beautiful but receding, of something loved but lost. It is exactly in the spaces cleared and leveled by America for the large and sober religion of the eighteenth century; it is where an old

house in Philadelphia contains an old picture of Franklin, or where the men of Maryland raised above their city the first monument of Washington. It is there that I feel like one who treads alone some banquet-hall deserted, whose lights are fled, whose garlands dead, and all save he departed. It is then that I feel as if I were the last Republican.

But when I say that the Republic of the Age of Reason is now a ruin, I should rather say that at its best it is a ruin. At its worst it has collapsed into a death-trap or is rotting like a dung-hill. What is the real Republic of our day, as distinct from the ideal Republic of our fathers, but a heap of corrupt capitalism crawling with worms — with those parasites, the professional politicians? Looking again at Swinburne's bitter but not ignoble poem, 'Before a Crucifix,' in which he bids Christ, or the ecclesiastical image of Christ, stand out of the way of the onward march of a political idealism represented by United Italy or the French Republic, I was struck by the strange and ironic exactitude with which every taunt he flings at the degradation of the old divine ideal would now fit the degradation of his own human ideal. The time has already come when we can ask his Goddess of Liberty, as represented by the actual Liberals, 'Have *you* filled full men's starved-out souls; have *you* brought freedom on the earth?' For every engine in which these old free-thinkers firmly and confidently trusted has itself become an engine of oppression, and even of class oppression. Its free Parliament has become an oligarchy. Its free Press has become a monopoly. If the pure Church has been corrupted in the course of two thousand years, what about the pure Republic that has rotted into a filthy plutocracy in less than one hundred years?

O hidden face of man, whereover
 The years have woven a viewless veil,
 If thou wert verily man's lover
 What did thy love or blood avail?
 Thy blood the priests make poison of;
 And in gold shekels coin thy love.

Which has most to do with shekels to-day, the priests or the politicians? Can we say in any special sense nowadays that clergymen, as such, make a poison out of the blood of the martyrs? Can we say it in anything like the real sense, in which we do say that yellow journal-

ists make a poison out of the blood of the soldiers?

But I understand how Swinburne felt when, confronted by the image of the carved Christ, and, perplexed by the contrast between its claims and its consequences, he said his strange farewell to it, hastily indeed, but not without regret, not even really without respect. I felt the same way myself when I looked for the last time on the Statue of Liberty.

RUSSIA'S DÉBÂCLE IN 1917

BY THE DUKE OF LEUCHTENBERG

[The author of this vivid account of the break-up of the Russian army, after the Kerensky offensive of 1917, is a former officer of a Turkestan brigade of chasseurs, who served as an aide-de-camp of Tsar Nicholas II.]

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WHEN the Great War broke out, I was in command of the First Battalion of the Preobrajensky Regiment of the Imperial Guards. Tsar Nicholas II had been colonel of this regiment when he ascended the throne, and was still its nominal commander. I had the honor to lead into battle this *élite* battalion, which headed the attack made on the first of August, 1914, near the city of Lublin. It was this attack that forced the Austrians of that sector to retreat. Later, I was in command of the reserve battalion of the same regiment. Subsequently I commanded the Twelfth Turkestan Chasseurs, from the retreat of 1915 to the end of 1916. During the latter period I was attached to the Tsar's suite as his aide-de-camp. It was in the latter capacity that I was in-

timately associated with the drama at Mohilev, and the Tsar's abdication.

I returned to the front later as a brigadier-general in the Seventh Division of Turkestan Chasseurs, where I remained until December 16, 1917. After we made our shameful armistice with Germany, and the soldiers were empowered to elect their own officers, I resigned, as I was entitled to do on account of my length of service, and retired to Kieff.

I trust my readers will pardon me for such a long introduction about myself; but these details are necessary to explain how I became personally familiar with the facts I am about to relate.

Up to the great retreat of 1915, which was due mainly to shortage of munitions, arms, and even soldiers, the old disci-