

G. K. Chesterton expounds the wisdom of faith, Paul Valéry the wisdom of æsthetic skepticism, and a German doctor the common sense of his profession.

# Words from the WISE

AN UNHOLY  
TRINITY

## I. SEVEN DAYS

By G. K. CHESTERTON

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YOU will all be struck by my remarkable resemblance to the Devil, having only fifteen minutes in which to talk about seven days, and having great wrath because my time is short. It is obvious that this survey of a week might be made in several ways, and especially in two ways. I might make it what is called a survey of public events, which means a survey of the very few important events that are made public. In other words, I could tell you all that you have already read in the newspapers, for some of the least important social events are still allowed to appear in the newspapers. But it would be much better fun to tell you the things that do not appear in the newspapers.

In that respect France is more fortunate than England; we have had plenty of politicians whose names have been linked with financiers like Stavisky, but we were never told much about them, except their affection for goldfish or their interest in breeding squirrels. It is a strange society; if private affairs are made public, it is only fair to say that public affairs are kept quite private.

As it is, I could only tell you what you have read and forgotten, and the only other obvious thing would be to describe what I myself have done during the week, which I have forgotten myself. Some vague memories remain, which might be made to sound vivid by unscrupulous selection.

For instance, it would be perfectly true to say that I spent most of last Sunday, after going to Mass, in making practical plans and arrangements for a murder. Indeed, it was a double murder, and, as both the murdered men were millionaires, I deeply grieve to announce that the plan was not actually carried into practice. But, then, it was not an honest manly murder in real life, but a sneakish, evasive, make-believe murder, only meant for a murder story in a magazine. But on the whole, I think any such diary of my days would be very dull to read and to write—which is probably why I never write it.

Now I would ask your attention to a third aspect of the thing, which has nothing to do with the loud triviality that we call public life or the loose triviality that we now generally mean by private life. It is not concerned with public life or private life but with Life. And it seems to me that Life is the one thing that most modern men never think about all their lives. We are asked to consider what has happened in seven days. Some of the most aged among you were told, a long while ago, that the world was made in six days. Most of you are now told that modern science contradicts this, a statement that is certainly much more of a lie than the statement it contradicts. It also shows that what these people call their modern science is not very modern.

The ancient science, the Victorian science of the days of Darwin, did indeed entertain a queer idea that anything was credible so long as it came very slowly. As if we were to say we could believe in a hippogryph if a horse grew only one feather at a time, or in a unicorn if its horn was not too

rapidly exalted but began as a little knob like a pimple. But that is not modern science, whatever else it is.

The real modern science, the new science—for what that is worth—tends more and more to an idea of mystical mathematical design, which may well be outside time. So far as the latest science goes, the cosmos might have appeared in six days, or in six seconds, or more probably in minus six seconds, or perhaps in the square root of minus six. But I am not at all insisting on any literal six days; it is not required by my own creed; and I am not talking about anybody's creed. I am talking about the very grand ideas suggested by that symbol—of the creative power being for six days creative and for the seventh contemplative. For the true end of all creation is completion; and the true end of all completion is contemplation.

Heaven forbid that, in the present unenlightened state of the world, I should talk theology. But why have modern men got no sense even of the majesty of mythology? Let us regard the Genesis story as a myth, but let us treat it as educated people do treat any other myth. When we read that Prometheus, the Titan, stole fire from Heaven for mankind, we do not say a giant was a thief who stole Jupiter's match box on Mount Olympus. When we read that the whole world went into a winter of lamentation because the Earth Goddess had lost her daughter, we do not say that those superstitious Greeks thought an old witch could wither the corn. We have some sense of the grandeur of these great natural allegories. And why have we no sense of the grandeur of that conception by which a week has become a wonderful and mystical

thing, in which man imitates God in his labor and in his rest?

I want to put to you what is hardest of all to put in words—something that is more private than private life. It is the fact that we are alive and that life is far more astonishing than anything that we enjoy or suffer in life. What has really happened during the last seven<sup>or</sup> days and nights? Seven times we have been dissolved into darkness as we shall be dissolved into dust; our very selves, so far as we know, have been wiped out of the world of living things; and seven times we have been raised alive like Lazarus and found all our limbs and senses unaltered with the coming of the day. That one simple fact of sleep is an almost perfect example of the sort of thing I mean. It is far more sensational than any fact or falsehood that can be read in the newspapers. It is far more sensational than any scandalous secret I might reveal to your delighted ears about my own private life.

If you want important events, such as journalism is supposed to report, those are the important events. If you want the latest news, the latest news is that I died last night and that I was miraculously reborn this morning, to your no small annoyance, for I fear that my return from the dead, though it is certainly news, is not necessarily good news. But what weeks and dates and Sundays and sabbaths and ancient ritual recurrences are meant to remind us of is exactly this enormous importance of daily life as it is lived by every human being, as it is related to death, and daylight, and all the mysterious lot of Man.

To tell you that I have performed this or that silly action, such as mak-

ing a speech like this, might gratify my vanity. To tell you that the leading public men who control our destinies have performed this or that silly action might gratify my irritation. But neither has very much to do with my life, and neither has anything to do with that great revolving wheel of cosmic light and darkness that we call a week.

And now you will naturally say that all this is extremely vague and transcendental and unpractical. I answer with some violence that it is at this moment by far the most practical problem in the world. Unless we can bring men back to enjoying the daily life, which moderns call a dull life, our whole civilization will be in ruins in about fifteen years. Whenever anybody proposes anything really practical to solve the economic evil to-day, the answer always is that the solution would not work, because the modern town populations would think life dull. That is because they are entirely unacquainted with life. They know nothing but distractions from life, dreams that may be found in the cinema, that is, brief oblivions of life.

## II

I am not going to talk about the advantages of this or that social solution, but it is true that this is the standing difficulty of all social solutions. Some people, like the late Mr. Galsworthy, think that the English poor should be helped further to colonize the Colonies. Some, of whom I am one, have even dared to dream that the English might be allowed to colonize England. But to both the objection is always essentially this: that they would be six miles from a cinema.

It is perhaps true, and another way of putting the same truth is that modern men have utterly lost the joy of life. They have to put up with the miserable substitute for the joys of life. And even these they seem less and less able to enjoy. Unless we can make ordinary men interested in ordinary life, we are under the vulgar despotism of those who cannot interest them but can at least amuse them. Unless we can make daybreak and daily bread and the creative secrets of labor interesting in themselves, there will fall on all our civilization a fatigue, which is the one disease from which civilizations do not recover. So died the great Pagan civilization—of bread and circuses and forgetfulness of the household gods.

So, whatever you do, do not jeer at the Book of Genesis. It would be better for you, it would be better for all of us if we were so absolutely bound by the Book of Genesis that the whole week was a series of symbolic services,

reminding us of the stages of creation. It would be better if every Monday, instead of being Black Monday, were always Bright Monday to commemorate the creation of the light. It would be better if Tuesday, at present a word of somewhat colorless connotation, represented a great feast of fountains and rivers and rolling streams, because it was the day of the division of the waters. It would be better if every Wednesday were an occasion for hanging the house with green boughs or blossoms, because these things were brought forth on the third day of creation; or that Thursday were sacred to the sun and moon; and Friday sacred to the fish and fowl; and so on. Then you might begin to have some notion of the importance of a week and what a high imaginative civilization might really do with a week. If it had the creative power to produce such a pageant of creation, it would not bother about cinemas.

## II. HOW LONG CAN MAN LIVE?

By PROFESSOR DR. WALTER WEISBACH

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**I**T FILLS us with pride that the average life span of our whole population increases at almost breakneck speed from year to year. Whereas in 1800 the average life span amounted to only twenty-seven years, it has risen to-day to fifty-six. In other words, it has more than doubled in a little over a hundred years. This success is largely due to strenuous attacks on epidemics and infant mortality.

A few figures on the vital statistics

outside Europe show what a dangerous rôle these two forces play in lowering the average expectancy of life, especially where urban industrial influences have not intervened. Among the Arabian Wahabees, for instance, 75 to 80 per cent of the children do not survive their first year because of the great number of contagious diseases, especially small pox. According to H. St. John Philby's descriptions of Arabia, old men are great rarities there. Elbert's expedition to Sunda