

WORLD WITHOUT AN END

MARK BARRON, O.P.



AMONG the modern inanities, about which the late genial Gilbert Keith Chesterton probably wrote at some time or other during his long and fruitful life, was that which endeavors to make everything except man himself responsible for the acts of man. Whether he actually did dispose of such a freak of human reason can best be answered by an ardent and finished Chestertonian. We shall here assume that he did not, and give imagination full play in an effort to conceive of how he might have gone about the job.

In order to make us see ourselves as he saw us Chesterton would very probably have begun with something quite utterly fantastic. Let us suppose, then, that he would have taken us, minus all baggage, into some future age of some three hundred years from the present. . . .

The entire world, unlike Caesar's Gaul, is now divided into two equal parts, called Huma and Idio, neither one of which is aware of the other's existence. In Huma the very spirit of the thirteenth century dominates all life and thought. All of those institutions at which subsequent ages have scoffed have been revived with the new vigor of a people who have profited by the mistakes of their fore-fathers. The Church is the one supreme spiritual power and is recognized as such by the secular rulers, all of whom are philosophers, speculatively practical. There is sin, of course, because the Humans are human. But there is no heresy, nor promise of it. All of dogma is compacted into the single statement: "God, the way and the end, is God, and man, His friend, is made to His image and likeness." While the Humans are not supremely happy, they know where happiness can be found.

Idio is pretty much the same as the world of the twentieth century except that the Idiots have long since wholly rejected the Catholic Church as an instrument in national life and have, by means of a plebiscite, voted for wholesale and unadulterated un-intellectualism. The people are rather evenly divided among various and sundry "isms." There are the Mechanists, Behaviorists, Freudians, Anti-Intellectualists, etc. But all are one in being Idiots and in their firm belief in the Idiotic dogma: "Nothing matters."

The various activities of these two peoples present an interesting contrast. In Huma, where the ancient Faith has once more come into its own, life is quiet and peaceful. There is an absence of sensationism. Much work is accomplished and with industry and skill. But there is time, too, for prayer and every holy-day is a holiday.

In Idio, on the contrary, there is ceaseless activity, but nothing is ever accomplished, since nothing matters. The more perfect Idiots spend hours in running around in circles. Those less perfect are forever going and never arriving. Meals are eaten (sometimes with rapacity, or again, with supreme listlessness) at any hour of the day or night. The only thing in Idio which can be depended upon for regularity is the sun which still rises and sets. (It may be well to note here that the rate of death by suicide is especially high among Idiots. Suicide is recognized by them as martyrdom for a cause where there is no cause.)

Right at this point in the course of his narrative Mr. Chesterton would have allowed an Idiot actually to arrive somewhere—in Huma, to be sure. Deeply impregnated with the beliefs and traditions of his people, the poor fellow soon becomes an object of wonderment, then of amusement, finally of Christian pity, to the Humans. Faced with the kindly request for some explanation of his strange behavior, the Idiot says something about his fulfillment of a natural process begun in some prehistoric age. He likewise declares that as far as he himself is concerned he really has no say in the matter of his actions. The Humans, for their part, recognize here a flash-back to some ancient and insane belief and they immediately set about building their first lunatic asylum in which to care for the sorry creature.

On the other hand, G. K. might have done the exact opposite. (In fact, a Human among Idiots would have been more typically Chestertonian.) Since the people of Huma believe in their native ability to act for a definite end, he might possibly have allowed one of them, more restless than his fellows, to set out on a journey in search of adventure. The purpose of this lone Human is accomplished for he meets with the strangest of adventures—Idio and the Idiots. Tremendously amused by their antics, he naturally seeks an explanation. He is appalled by the answer, given with every show of sincere conviction. He begins to argue, but only makes himself the object of grave suspicion. All of his deep-rooted convictions about free will, man's beginning and end in God, a purpose in life for every creature (even a poor Idiot), are met with denial and the dogged refusal to believe in so easy and reasonable an explanation. And so the Idiots, Mechanist, Freudian, Behaviorist, Anti-Intellectualist, solemnly agree

to erect a clinic in which to examine more closely and at their leisure this strange person who yet would speak of God and the dignity of man.

The ultimate fate of the two unfortunate wanderers? The Idiot would commit suicide—a martyr to his belief. The Human might possibly be murdered in partial fulfillment of an Idiot's "sublimation." But then again, perhaps he would be allowed to confess to the end his faith in God and His image and likeness, man.

AT THE CRIB

E. SEBASTIAN CARLSON, O.P.

Gee, Sister, if I had been He
I would have laughed so hard to see
That solemn donkey stare at Me
And flop those ears that I had made!

I'd pet his chin, and stroke his nose,
And let him sniff My hands and toes
If Joseph fell into a doze
When Mama went to town to trade.

I'd move to let My donkey gnaw
And champ the prickly manger straw
That kept Me warm, until I saw
He had enough, and moved away.

Then when we'd gone, I'd make his dream
Of yellow corn and frothy cream,
And stable bright with God's own Beam
Who came to play with him one day.