

### ON THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH

That this is a very peculiar world has often been the observation of many keen-witted citizens. Mr. G. K. Chesterton, who was always quick at sizing up situations, preferred to call the world paradoxical rather than peculiar, and so was much more arresting than those who were content with calling the world peculiar. For it is possible for something to be peculiar yet very normal and natural. On the other hand, something which is paradoxical is not very normal, nor very natural. A paradox, if we should believe the dictionary, is something which is widely recognized as true, but which in reality is opposed to truth.

Mr. Chesterton was a prolific writer who had a very nasty habit of disturbing the complacency into which he firmly believed much of modern society had fallen. He exhausted a great deal of energy pointing out that most of the things which we accept as conventional and, of course, necessary, are absolutely ridiculous and contrary to what one should expect of rational animals. On many occasions he took pains to show that it was undeniably true that the best things in life are free, and at the same time, point out that these things, more tremendously wonderful than anything man could ever conceive, are the most ignored. At other times, he would wield his pen in a sustained effort to show that there is a great demand in the world for liberty, or freedom, or some other abstract quality, but that those who make the most noise about such things are searching in the most unlikely places. For instance, almost everyone thinks of contentment as a state of mind where oblivion has the controlling interest. Only Chesterton would say that contentment is "the power of getting out of any situation all that there is in it. It is arduous and it is rare."

Being of a suspicious disposition, I have often suspected that Chesterton wrote an essay on every paradox with which the world has ever been afflicted. It seems, indeed, that he wrote about almost everything, from the enlightenment that was the chief characteristic of the so called Dark Ages, to the frivolousness of modern fiction. Since I have never had time to make an accurate estimation of this notion, I merely content myself with wondering how he would have treated the paradoxes which are so much a part of the life of this day's society.

What brought about this reminiscence of G.K.C. was a pet paradox of mine which, paradoxically enough, is more



common but less recognized than most. In these days of fast moving events, of speeding automobiles, of crack express trains, of jet propelled airplanes, of atomic bombs, of tremendous propaganda campaigns on behalf of health vs. disease, and particularly of insurance companies which handle millions and millions of dollars every year, we have been impressed most forcibly with the uncertainty of death. We turn our backs on one reminder only to meet face to face with another.

Regularly we read the lists of fatalities of unfortunate victims of auto mishaps, fires, drownings, and other accidents which are usually the result of carelessness. From time to time, we are subjected to intense propaganda campaigns urging us to drive carefully, obey the traffic laws, not to play with matches, not to smoke in bed, not to go in swimming after dinner or alone. Usually the advice is accompanied by frightening statistics reporting the deaths of so many people from a particular accident over a certain period of time. The deaths resulting from such accidents are always emphasized as untimely, unnecessary, and preventable, all of which remind us of the uncertainty involved. Insurance companies are continuously prompting us to provide for the future, for ourselves, or, in the event of our demise, for our families. Their advertisements warn of the uncertainty of death, and the terrible possibilities of leaving loved ones financially insecure. Most noticeable of all, the factors which impress upon us the uncertainty of death these days are, perhaps, those campaigns which insist that cancer, heart trouble, and anything else you might like to include, are often fatal. These few examples from our daily lives ought to convince anyone of the uncertainty of death.

Now, this uncertainty regarding death is nothing but perfect proof of the certainty of death. And therein rests the paradox. We have been well aware that not only is the moment of death uncertain, but that the various circumstances which end this earthly existence are also uncertain. But the knowledge of the uncertainty, instead of making us realize the certainty of the fact, has apparently inspired the flight from this uninviting reality. So, while it is a certainty that the moment of death is uncertain, it is much more of a certainty that death is absolutely certain.

Yet how frantic are the efforts to flee from such reality; as if we could get away from it! We may obscure the reality of death by lamenting unfortunate accidents and



qualifying them with an "if", by emphasizing the advances medical science has made in combatting disease, or by making it an unwritten rule of society not to deal in such a reality by viewing the topic as stupid and preposterous. It may even be deduced from this captivating little paradox that, because of the failure to recognize the certainty of death, which surely follows from an acknowledgment of its uncertainty, many do not bother to prepare for it. And yet, we all admit that we must prepare to meet all realities. The trouble, it seems, is the failure to recognize reality.

—D. S. M. '52.

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## TWO WARS

He yawned  
And shook off the radio-active coils;  
He stared  
At naked limbs—he had no boils!  
He strode  
O'er broken teacups and teletype;  
And wept  
O'er his lost teeth and his dead wife.

They met,  
The two survivors of the atomic blast;  
And talked  
Of rocket tubes and aspirin of the past;  
They split  
Over the ruins of a TV set;  
And fought  
With knotted sticks to mutated death.

And then the sound of the trumpet.

e.l.e. '51

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He who provides for this life, but takes no care for eternity is wise for a moment but a fool forever.—Tillotson

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Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.

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Whatever makes men good Christians, makes them good citizens.—Webster.