

14/165 Some observations on Mr. G. K. Chesterton

One of the several ideas on which Mr. G. K. Chesterton is always insisting is ~~on the one~~ that nothing hinders success so much as to be always think of success, or to make of success a cult. This is, of course, only one example of his general position that nothing so fails to attain a thing, as to be always thinking of it.

Leaving for the moment the general position which this particular one represents in one respect, we will do no more than criticize ~~his~~ the assertion that nothing so hinders success as the cult of success.

I have always thought so. But I disagree with Mr. G. K. Chesterton. The point is that he has not hit the right nail on the head: the point is that, although he has, he has driven it in crooked. At least, he has omitted to back up his statement with the one real argument sustaining it.

Mr. Chesterton's general position is for instinct against intelligence; he is thus, in his own and original way, a member of that great contemporary current which is a reaction against rationalism, against {...}, against too much explaining, of which the first manifestation was the "symbolist" literary movement in literature called the "symbolism".

No one by taking thought addeth a cubit to his stature. That is true. But it is also true that by not taking thought no cubit is likewise added. Thinking about things may not explain them; but not thinking about them is hardly calculated to explain them /likely to do so\.

Another thing that Mr. Chesterton has omitted to see is this that Mr. Chesterton's error is the error of anti-rationalists, which is precisely the kind of error which the rationalists commit. Explanations are absurd; but explanations are natural. It is natural to try to explain things; it is also natural to notice that we cannot explain them. The only thing unnatural to ex-

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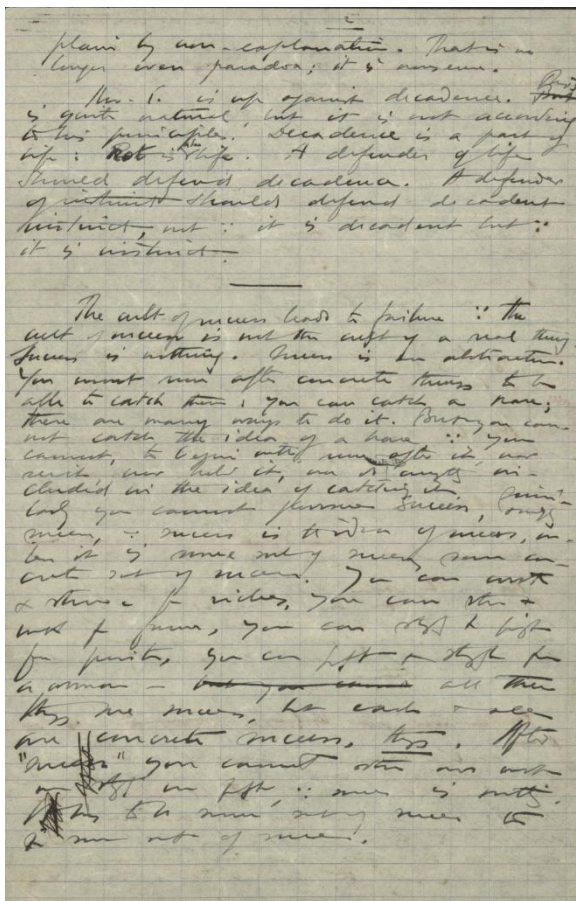
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plain by non-explanation. That is no longer even paradox; it is nonsense.

Mr. Chesterton is up against decadence. ~~But~~ This is quite natural, but it is not according to his principles. Decadence is a part of life: not is life. A defender of life should defend decadence. A defender of instinct should defend decadent instinct, not because it is decadent but because it is instinct.

The cult of success leads to failure because the cult of success is not the cult of a real thing. Success is nothing. Success is an abstraction. You must run after concrete things to be able to catch them: you can catch a hare; there are many ways to do it. But you cannot catch the idea of a hare, because you cannot, to begin with, run after it, nor see it, nor hold it, nor do with it anything included the idea of catching it. Similarly you cannot pursue success, simply success, because success is the idea of success, unless it is some sort of success, some concrete sort of success. You can work and strive for riches, you can strive and work for fame, you can struggle and fight for position, you can fight and struggle for a woman - ~~but you cannot~~ all these things are success, but each and all are concrete success, things. After "success" you cannot strive nor work nor struggle nor fight, because success is nothing. It has to be some sort of success to be some sort of success.

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