

## THE BATTLE OF PLUTOCRACY: G. K. CHESTERTON, WELLS, MASTERMAN AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY.

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G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936), H. G. Wells (1866-1946) and George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), are rightly regarded as the leading literary giants of the Edwardian period, and their frequent clashes of opinion across three decades have understandably been the focus of considerable scholarly interest. However, much less attention has been paid to the relationship between Chesterton, Wells, and Charles Frederick Gurney Masterman (1873-1927), a prominent Edwardian journalist and Liberal politician. Masterman lacked the stature of his better known peers and also the literary personas they carefully crafted in response to the demands of the Edwardian reading public.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he engaged closely with their ideas and developed his own, distinctive form of progressive liberalism as a result. Differences were apparent at an early stage of his friendship with both men and became more pronounced as political conflict in Britain intensified in the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War. Focusing on these three writers together brings to light sympathies and fissures in Edwardian literary culture that have been unduly neglected. The tensions between them became acute with the sharpening of political conflict in the years before the First World War, particularly over the issue of plutocracy: rule by wealth. The increasingly strained relations between Chesterton and Masterman and Chesterton and Wells, especially, reveal much about the complex and shifting nature of Edwardian liberalism and uncertainty concerning the future of British democracy and nationhood itself in the aftermath of the Great War. These debates are still with us.

The starting-point of this article is a satirical piece that Chesterton wrote in the *Daily News* in 1908; it was a response to the latest provocation by Shaw in the journal *The New Age*. Exasperated by Chesterton's evasiveness when attempts were made to pin down his political creed, he demanded that he 'make up his mind as to how he really wants the world to be arranged under the existing conditions of human nature and physical geography'.<sup>2</sup> As ever,

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<sup>1</sup> For a fine analysis of the compromises with spiritual and literary principles these personas could exact from authors, see John Coates, 'Max Beerbohm, Chesterton and the Public Performances of Edwardian Writers', *The Chesterton Review*, 30 (2014), 367-98.

<sup>2</sup> George Bernard Shaw, 'Belloc and Chesterton', *The New Age*, 15 February 1908, 310. Shaw was echoing H. G. Wells, who had participated in the wider debate in *The New Age*

Chesterton seized the opportunity to stir up more controversy with customary zeal. However, instead of outlining the contours of his perfect society, he sought to undermine the fixation with utopia that in his view had plagued recent literature and thought. For him, its clearest expression could be found in Wells' novels, for all their imaginative depth.<sup>3</sup> Chesterton centred his response to Shaw on a fictional industrialist named 'Phipps', an obvious play on 'Kipps'. He began his article dryly: 'The other day my friend Phipps was showing me over his utopia, which is just behind the tennis court.'<sup>4</sup> He went on to describe in detail this latest attempt to create a paradise on earth: the piped sunlight and moonlight, the smell of roses and the smell of the sea which could be turned on at the touch of a button.

But friendly satire soon gave way to political polemic as he remonstrated against the umbrella stand; in Phipps's utopia, this served as a repository for walking sticks, too. Chesterton despaired of the modish industrialist's confusion of the two objects. The walking stick was less the aid to mobility that it has become since than a means of public gesture in making a point with added emphasis. As such, it was an essential part of Edwardian attire, of the Edwardian gentleman especially, as that figure became more assertive and voluble than in the past, spurred on by the 'noisy' patriotisms of the period of which he quickly became the mainstay.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the umbrella was a device for shelter and protection, an instinct that had assumed a collective form in modern politics through the interventionist state.

Curiously, Chesterton regarded the walking stick as the lifeblood of democracy, its 'gentlemanly' associations notwithstanding. However, the umbrella represented the antithesis of democracy: the subversion of human ties

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concerning the political views of Chesterton and his close friend Hilaire Belloc: 'About Chesterton and Belloc', *The New Age*, 11 January, 1908, 210.

<sup>3</sup> In discussing the mindset of his elders in his *Autobiography*, Chesterton referred to the philosophy of 'Looking Forwards' which his uncle, although less so his father, embraced as a duty, and which later became 'sublimated by the genius of Mr. Wells': *Autobiography* (1937; Sevenoaks: Fisher Press, 2000), 26.

<sup>4</sup> G. K. Chesterton, 'The Impropriety of Umbrella Stands', *The Daily News* (hereafter *DN*), 7 March 1908, *G. K. Chesterton at the Daily News: Literature, Liberalism and Revolution, 1901-1913*, ed. Julia Stapleton, 8 vols, 5 (London: 2012), 33-5.

<sup>5</sup> See J. H. Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain 1900-1939* (London: Routledge, 1986), 25.

Grainger does not use the word 'gentlemen' to describe those who articulated and contested rival *patriae* the most insistently in this period, but instead Kipling's concept of the 'masterless man'; this was closely associated with the Victorian ideal of the gentleman centred on manliness and independence of spirit. Typically, 'the masterless man' was a leading literary figure of the order of Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, D. H. Lawrence, Hilaire Belloc, George Gissing, Edward Thomas, and Kipling himself. For shifts in the image of the gentleman in Victorian England, of which the Kipling's 'masterless man' was an extension, see Christine Berberich, *The Image of the Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature: Englishness and Nostalgia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 20-2.

and associations at their deepest level as the state took greater control of the lives of its citizens. At the root of his thought in this regard was the concept of subsidiarity that had been central to Pope Leo XIII's recent social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). This was the belief that individuals, families and smaller associations were better suited to perform certain tasks than government. Chesterton sought to challenge the increasing alignment of democracy with collective provision, whether of a liberal or a socialist kind; while superficially radical, progressivism in this form merely served the interests of an economic elite in developing an efficient labour force on the model of Germany. He was influenced here by Belloc's concept of the 'servile state'; this was the idea that while the capitalists would never yield to socialism, they would take responsibility for the well-being of their employees although at the expense of their freedom and independence. For Belloc and Chesterton, the classic illustration of this development within capitalism was the National Insurance Act of 1911, based on compulsory contributions by workers as well as employers.<sup>6</sup>

It is hardly original to point out that democracy was central to Chesterton's political vision. But his conception of existing democracy – in Britain at least – as lying in an unbridgeable division of interest between rulers and the ruled is less commented upon.<sup>7</sup> In his eyes, the ruled part alone qualified as 'the democracy'; by this he meant the people, more specifically, the English people, who had remained famously silent after several centuries of oppression.<sup>8</sup> The people lay at the root of Distributism, the ideology that called for the decentralisation of property and power for which Chesterton was also indebted to Belloc. This meant that democracy was closely allied with localism, on the one hand, and nationhood on the other, bypassing the nation-state which in his eyes was fast becoming an instrument of the rich.

This conception of democracy underpinned Chesterton's increasingly acrimonious exchanges with other Edwardian writers and thinkers. As the Marconi scandal unfolded, Chesterton struggled to contain his hostility towards Wells and Masterman in particular. Before turning to those exchanges and their basis in radically different conceptions of democracy, we need to look more closely at their source in Chesterton's early Christian beliefs. These were beliefs that Masterman, at least, had once shared, and as a result of Chesterton's direct personal influence. With Hilaire Belloc, the two men met frequently at political meetings and at what Masterman referred to as 'orgies' – convivial

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<sup>6</sup> For these two influences on Chesterton's thought, see Jay P. Corrin, *Catholic Progressives in England after Vatican II* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 26, 29-31.

<sup>7</sup> An exception is Grainger, *Patriotisms*, 110-111.

<sup>8</sup> Chesterton, 'The Secret People,' *The Neolith*, 1 (November 1907), 1-2; *Collected Poems of G. K. Chesterton* (1927; London: Methuen, 1950), 173-6. See also his *A Short History of England* (London: Methuen, 1917).

nights out with like-minded writers, artists, and politicians, a common feature being poetry reading.<sup>9</sup> They had their differences over social reform, differences which they aired publicly; but before Masterman became a leading member of the Liberal government after 1909, these differences were not such as to weaken their alliance on greater, spiritual matters and the friendship on which it was built.<sup>10</sup> Both were active in the Christian Social Union, the Christian Socialist branch of Anglo-Catholicism led by Henry Scott Holland, although Masterman to a much greater extent than Chesterton.

The nature of Chesterton's influence on Masterman is best seen through a brief examination of his dramatic poem *The Wild Knight*, published in 1900. It concerned a poet who set out to slay the dragon, a metaphor for the modern cynic. The antitype of the cynic was the wild knight in relentless pursuit of God, determined to enter the chapel of a house that has fallen into the hands of felons. On his late-life conversion to Christianity, the poet glimpsed 'as in one flash,/ The whole divine democracy of things'.<sup>11</sup> In doing so he discounted the idea that devil-worshippers were made by the devil himself. This applied even to the odious Lord Orm, on whose land the soliloquy takes place. Orm is so far corrupted that he rejects all law, including the law of chivalry that commands him to accept the challenge of a duel. But, the poet continues, in the presence of his love, 'I tell you every soul is great ... /how radiant and how pure /Is he, who'er he be, who next shall cross this /scrap of grass': a cue for the entry of Lord Orm.

The poem made a significant impact on Masterman. It was to have featured in an anthology of a hundred pieces of blank verse that he planned but never brought to fruition.<sup>12</sup> He quoted from some of its opening lines in reviewing Wells's *Anticipations* in 1902. Wells, he argued, had defined progress

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<sup>9</sup> For a report on the second annual meeting of the League of Young Liberals in 1905, chaired by Masterman and attended by Chesterton and Belloc, see 'A Positive Creed: Young Liberals and the Election', *The Daily News*, 30 November, 1905, 8. For Masterman's account of one such 'orgie' in January 1908 at which both Chesterton and Belloc were present, see Lucy Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman: A Biography* (1939; London: Frank Cass, 1968), 94; for a dinner party hosted by the Mastermans for Chesterton and his wife and Masterman's brother Sextus, an Anglican priest, the following year, see Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 126; for Chesterton's reminiscence of another 'orgie', see Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 379.

<sup>10</sup> Masterman reviewed critically Chesterton's first book of prose, *The Defendant*, attacking his sense of wonder at the modern city when the correct attitude of the social reformer – he believed – was one of pessimism and despair: 'The Blasphemy of Optimism', *The Speaker*, 26 April 1902, in *G. K. Chesterton: The Critical Judgments*, ed. Denis J. Conlon (Antwerp: Antwerp Studies in English Literature, 1976), 40-55. Chesterton responded robustly to Masterman in the second edition of *The Defendant* that appeared later in the year: *The Defendant* (1901; London: Dent, 1902), 8. But he praised Masterman's first-hand account of the London poor in *From the Abyss: Or Its Inhabitants, by One of Them* (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1902) in 'From the Abyss', *DN*, 12 December 1902, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Chesterton, 'The Wild Knight', *Collected Poems*, 377.

<sup>12</sup> Lucy Masterman, *C. F. G. Masterman*, 136.

in narrow terms of mechanical advance, neglecting the larger and more enduring ideals suggested by the poem: ‘Love: longing: human sympathy and human pity: the passion of nationality: the unsatisfied reaching to something beyond: the continual effort towards God’.<sup>13</sup>

Like Chesterton, Masterman admired Wells, particularly as a social prophet.<sup>14</sup> But he objected strongly to Wells’s subsuming of the individual in the life of the race, a view from which he never departed. In 1923, he reviewed Wells’s *Men Like Gods*, a science fiction story that represented a further expression of Wells’s overarching search for a humanist alternative to religion.<sup>15</sup> He did so in much the same vein as he had approached Tennyson’s work two decades earlier. Contrary to Tennyson, it mattered intensely if the individual died, regardless of whether the race endured, a view that aligned him closely with Chesterton in the reaction against the scepticism and pessimism of the *fin de siècle*.<sup>16</sup>

Curiously, it was democratic theorists such as Walt Whitman, not religious thinkers, who influenced this belief in the first instance. Whitman and other literary optimists took Chesterton ‘back’ to a Christian sense of indebtedness for creation, a subliminal presence in his life since childhood.<sup>17</sup> Masterman found time to review a biography of Whitman in the tense days leading up to the 1906 election when he first entered parliament as the member for West Ham; against the background of much rivalry and intrigue among Liberals and Progressives in the constituency, his victory had been by no means assured.<sup>18</sup> To Masterman the significance of *Leaves of Grass* lay in Whitman’s ‘worship of life’, his clear distinction between ‘being’ and ‘not being’ that provided the moving force behind the chants of the New Democracy. He wrote:

Everything that exists has some quality or ingredient – the ingredient of existence – which vindicates it in a kind of cosmic judgement. Creation

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Anticipations’, *The Commonwealth: A Christian Social Magazine*, VII (January 1902), 27.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Toye, ‘H. G. Wells and the New Liberalism’, *Twentieth-Century British History*, 19 (2008), 156-85 (180–1).

<sup>15</sup> ‘The Religion of Mr. Wells: A Vision of Infinite Boredom’, *The Churchman*, 2 June, 1923, 10–11.

<sup>16</sup> See his review of Herbert Trench’s poetry: ‘Mr. Herbert Trench’s Poems’, *Albany Review*, VII, 12 (March 1908), 683-90 (688).

<sup>17</sup> William Oddie, *Chesterton and the Romance of Orthodoxy: The Making of GKC, 1874-1908* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6, 123-4.

<sup>18</sup> See his letter to Herbert Gladstone, Liberal Chief Whip, of 15 December, 1904, BL. Add. Ms 46062, (f. 53) in which he thanked Gladstone for visiting the constituency and reiterating in a speech the need for social reform. Gladstone had been heckled by ‘starving’ constituents: Masterman quoted 1 Corinthians 15:32 in apologising for his having had to ‘fight with beasts’. But he and Gladstone may have most wanted to target hostile moderate liberals: Masterman referred to ‘the splendid way in which you triumphed over a situation of extraordinary difficulty.’

itself has stamped a sacredness upon all created things. And every morning reveals to the eye not blinded by its splendour, the fashioning of the palace of heaven.<sup>19</sup>

As Jock Macleod has argued recently, ‘Life’ became the central motif of advanced liberalism in its literary guise.<sup>20</sup> He recognises Masterman as a key figure in the literary network focused on H. J. Massingham that gave the idea of life this purchase. He says much less of Chesterton, apart from acknowledging his association with the network. Yet if we look at Chesterton’s early critiques of Wells, the concept of life in the form that Masterman employed it – as creation in its highest spiritual sense – is equally insistent.

For example, in an article of 1903 ominously entitled ‘The Worship of the Insect’, Chesterton classed Wells with Shaw, Webb, Benjamin Kidd and other ‘sociologists’. The principal characteristic of their calling was a disregard of human beings as mammals, family creatures bound by the chivalrous code of love, honour, passion, and comradeship that had been at the heart of *The Wild Knight*. The sociologists had sought instead to convert individuals into insects with no family or other ties. Essentially what they sought was a disciplined army of ants which could be sacrificed to a more efficient and – in the sociologists’ terms – noble future.<sup>21</sup> The contrast between mammals and insects was another means of reinforcing the ‘subsidiarity’ concept expressed in Chesterton’s walking-stick/umbrella dichotomy considered earlier. For both Chesterton and Masterman, the ‘insect state’ became a byword for collectivism and the concern of its advocates to substitute an ideal of social utility for the spiritual and emotional life of the species. Masterman’s savage review of *The Social Problem* by the New Liberal theorist John Hobson emphasised his solidarity with Chesterton on issues of education and human reproduction. While Hobson, like Chesterton’s ‘sociologists’, would subject these and other high human ends to state control in the interests of eliminating ‘waste’, Masterman defended the Church in fixing the sights of humanity on “‘something that was before the elements and owes no homage under the sun’”.<sup>22</sup> He levelled the same criticism against Wells, although expressed more charitably

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Walt Whitman’, review of Henry Bryan Binns, *A Life of Walt Whitman* (London: Methuen, 1905), *Daily News*, 24 February, 1906, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Jock Macleod, *Literature, Journalism, and the Vocabularies of Liberalism: Politics and Letters, 1886–1916* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 109–13.

<sup>21</sup> Chesterton, ‘The Worship of the Insect’, *DN*, 7 March 1903, in *G. K. Chesterton at the Daily News*, vol. 2, 18–21

<sup>22</sup> Masterman, ‘The Social Problem’, review of J. A. Hobson *The Social Problem: Life and Work* (London: Nisbet, 1901), in *The Speaker*, 13 July, 1901, 417–8 (418). He is quoting the seventeenth-century English writer Sir Thomas Browne in his religious testimony *Religio Medici* (1642).

and with a deeper appreciation of Wells's gifts as a social commentator and reformer:

Strangely enough for such a shrewd observer of the tragic comedy of human affairs, he appears still to believe that the intellect, the human reason, counts for much in human progress; that men may be reasoned into sanity, cleanliness, order, and an ardour for all excellent things.<sup>23</sup>

Although focused on the ends rather than the means of reform, Chesterton delivered a similar rebuke to Wells in 1908. In a critical review of *First and Last Things*, he found Wells wanting even by his new standard of 'art' as the measure of human ideals and institutions. In dismissing cold, logical approaches to social organisation, Wells had substituted aesthetic criteria instead; the idea of 'proportionality' was to provide the new basis of society, reflecting the fluctuation in tastes and beliefs. But for Chesterton, Wells had failed to appreciate the fixed 'outline' of terms such as justice in the minds of ordinary humanity, evoking passion and feeling akin to a primeval emotion. To that extent, justice was already on the plane of 'beauty'; it was in no need of redefinition, certainly not through vague references to 'proportionality' that would only weaken its appeal.<sup>24</sup> Here, we can detect the same hostility towards relativism that informed Chesterton's critique of Impressionism in art. The trick of the light – the counterpart of Wells' conception of 'proportion' – would undermine the idea of an unchanging reality beyond the realm of subjective impression.<sup>25</sup>

One commentator – Joseph Cleary – has well suggested that in rejecting the notion of an enduring substance in the world, Wells is best regarded as following in the tradition of William of Ockham. Chesterton, by contrast, was a modern-day Aquinas, emphasising the unity and diversity at the heart of creation and the denial that the particular can be collapsed into the general.<sup>26</sup> This is how Chesterton could embrace patriotism within the notion of a common humanity, while Wells would dispense with national distinctions in the interest of establishing a world state.

Chesterton's conception of the permanence of all things associated with 'the democracy' underscored his differences with Wells at the deepest level.

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<sup>23</sup> Masterman, *In Peril of Change: Essays Written in Time of Tranquillity* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), 204.

<sup>24</sup> Chesterton, 'The Religion of Wells', *DN*, 6 November 1908, in *G. K. Chesterton at the Daily News*, vol. 5, 202-5.

<sup>25</sup> For an incisive account of Chesterton's critique of impressionism and its distinctiveness, see John Coates, 'The Reaction against Impressionism: An Aspect of the Visual in Chesterton's Work', *The Chesterton Review*, 9 (1983), 314-33, especially 323-4.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph R. McCleary, *The Historical Imagination of G. K. Chesterton: Locality, Patriotism and Nationalism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 39.

For Wells, the world – the existing world, at any rate – was rooted in transience and mutability focused on the human race as a whole. For Chesterton, the immutability of the world was more prominent than the changes it underwent, and it was ordinary individuals who were most alive to this feature, not collectivities or elites. As a result, the sharpest moral vision belonged to individuals.

Wells persisted in rejecting all claims concerning the nature of humanity. His anti-essentialism invited more criticism from Chesterton in response to the wide-ranging collection of essays he edited under the title *The Great State* in June 1912. For Chesterton, the breadth and diffuseness of the book said much about the lack of first principles among most of its contributors, Wells included, which resulted in a certain aimlessness. He was to say of Wells in his *Autobiography* that ‘Whenever I met him, he seemed to be coming from somewhere, rather than going anywhere.’<sup>27</sup> The only exceptions he made to his verdict on the book were the chapters by his brother, Cecil Chesterton, and Conrad Noel; they were his allies in what had become by then a concerted campaign by the radical right to restore British democracy to its rightful owners – the people.<sup>28</sup> At the centre of this campaign were the two *Witness* journals, the *Eye Witness* of 1911 edited by Belloc which quickly became the *New Witness* the following year, edited by Cecil Chesterton.<sup>29</sup>

Up to this point, Chesterton’s clashes with Wells had been friendly, outwardly, at least, soldered by his discovery during a holiday in Rye – not dated but before 1914 – that Wells shared his love of toy theatres.<sup>30</sup> Of all the literary targets in *Heretics* – the work of 1905 in which Chesterton berated the perversity of his contemporaries in actively seeking philosophical error – Wells is treated the most gently. He credited Wells with being less taken in by the illusion of the ‘superman’ than Shaw and of simply being pulled in that direction by a misplaced admiration for W. E. Henley; he believed it possible that ‘one of the best thinkers of the day’ could still be saved from the ‘heresy of immoral hero-worship’.<sup>31</sup> But his distance from those such as Wells, whom he suspected of betraying the democratic vision enshrined in the walking stick, became increasingly evident. He resigned from his regular Saturday column in *The Daily News* in February 1913, incensed by the attempt by the editor to silence his public expressions of disdain for George Cadbury, the proprietor.<sup>32</sup> But there

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<sup>27</sup> *Autobiography*, 215.

<sup>28</sup> Chesterton, ‘The Unpainted Picture’, *DN*, 29 June 1912, in *G. K. Chesterton at the Daily News*, vol. 8, 112-5.

<sup>29</sup> See Tom Villis, *Reaction and the Avant-Garde: The Revolt against Liberal Democracy in Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Tauris, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Chesterton, *Autobiography*, 214.

<sup>31</sup> Chesterton, *Heretics*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: John Lane, 1908), 89.

<sup>32</sup> Julia Stapleton, *Christianity, Patriotism, and Nationhood: The England of G. K. Chesterton* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 112.



were wider issues behind his departure, as emerged in an angry exchange in the 'Letters' column of the newspaper in 1916 between Wells and both Chesterton brothers, Gilbert and Cecil.

At the heart of the controversy was Wells's claim that the *Witness* crowd were 'stirring mud'. He likened Belloc's ideal of the 'distributive state' – that is, one in which private property is widely dispersed – to the proposal of the Edwardian fraudster, Horatio Bottomley, for 'government by businessmen'; it was neither 'solid' nor 'sober'.<sup>33</sup> Wells claimed further that Belloc and Cecil Chesterton had dismissed democracy in the modern state as 'unworkable'. He regarded G. K. Chesterton as less culpable than his friends in maintaining a wholly unnecessary war against plutocracy. But far from pacifying Chesterton, he only succeeded in provoking him further.<sup>34</sup>

Chesterton was particularly concerned to deny that he and the company he now kept ever claimed that democracy was 'unworkable'; it was only unworkable within the present 'party system'. He went on to define his differences with the newspaper, and also Wells, in – as he put it – 'embracing the policy of the *New Witness*'. The first difference centred on the ownership of the *Daily News* by a capitalist magnate opposed to the recent strikes across all areas of heavy industry, and dictating editorial policy accordingly. The second was the system of compulsory social insurance that indentured large sections of the workforce to the state – a reference to the National Insurance Act of 1911 which the *Daily News* supported. The third was the existence of 'secret political funds' that had proved central to the party system. These were – in his words – 'collected and distributed without the ordinary checks applied to the cheapest club'. Such irregularities deserved, he said, 'the language of direct denunciation which has always been used in history by those who thought themselves in the presence of political corruption'.<sup>35</sup>

In calling into question the entire political system, Chesterton distanced himself from Masterman as well as Wells. In assisting Lloyd George with the financial details of the National Insurance Act from his position as under-secretary at the home office, Masterman had become a figure of deep suspicion for Chesterton. He dedicated his book *What's Wrong with the World* (1910) to Masterman, his only friend to occupy a high office of state. The work assailed the 'Hudge-Gudge' mentality of organising working people that united individualists and collectivists in one common cause, despite their differences. The 'open letter' format of the dedication was full of the suggestion of Masterman's apostasy, actual or impending. He apologised for presenting 'so

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<sup>33</sup> See A. J. A. Morris, 'Bottomley, Horatio William (1860–1933)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and B. Harrison, vol. 6 (Oxford, 2004), 768-70 (769).

<sup>34</sup> Wells, 'Liberty and Mr. Belloc: The Art of Stirring Mud', *DN*, 24 July 1916, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Chesterton, 'Liberty and Mr. Wells', letter to the editor, *DN*, 27 July 1916, in *G. K. Chesterton at the Daily News*, vol. 8, 244-7 (246-7).

wild a composition to one who has recorded two or three of the really impressive visions of the moving millions of England' – a reference to Masterman's earlier chronicles of the life of England's poorest citizens.<sup>36</sup> Masterman, he wrote, was 'the only man alive who can make the map of England crawl with life'. But, he continued, politicians 'are none the worse for a few inconvenient ideals'; and besides, his friend would recognise in the book their many arguments together.<sup>37</sup> While Masterman reviewed the book respectfully, his scepticism that his friend had anything better to offer than socialism as a remedy for the problems of industrial civilisation was evident.<sup>38</sup>

But the turning point in their relationship was the Marconi affair of 1912, which poisoned many of Chesterton's friendships. Masterman supported Lloyd George and the other 'Marconi ministers' in fending off the allegations of the Chesterton-Belloc circle that the ministers had engaged in insider dealing. Their friendship never recovered, despite Masterman's attempts to revive it in the aftermath of Chesterton's serious illness in the winter of 1914-15. In October, 1915, he wrote to Chesterton's wife from Wellington House, where he led the Government's wartime propaganda department, responding to one of her suggestions for enhancing its work. He concluded the letter by expressing his delight at Chesterton's return to good health, adding, 'It would be jolly to see him again and you also, as in the old time when we "drowned theology with tea"'. And now we are fighting on the same side against the same enemies.<sup>39</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that a revival of their old friendship took place.<sup>40</sup>

Neither did Chesterton let up on the issue of 'Plutocracy' after the war. On the contrary, dismayed by the apparent return to 'business as usual', he launched an all-out attack on the 'rich men's club' that now passed for government in Britain. He wrote a spoof article for *Pears' Christmas Annual* in 1919 which took the form of an entry in a school history text book of 1969; it was entitled 'England in 1919'. The interest of this highly imaginative article, filled with dry wit, lies in the new twist it gave to his earlier dichotomy between the individual and society. In 1908, he had been concerned to defend the individual against the threat of the protective impulse of modern society. In 1919, his focus had shifted to the 'people', in danger of being obscured by an unhealthy interest in individuals.

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<sup>36</sup> Masterman, *From the Abyss*; and *The Condition of England* (London: Methuen, 1909).

<sup>37</sup> Chesterton, *What's Wrong with the World* (London: Cassell, 1910), Dedication.

<sup>38</sup> Masterman, 'The Battle of Hudge and Gudge', *The Nation*, 2 July, 1910, 483-4.

<sup>39</sup> Masterman to Frances Chesterton, 7 October 1915, British Library Add. Ms. 73454. The reference to 'drowning theology with tea' suggested Masterman's stronger commitment to Anglicanism than Chesterton and the differences of theological opinion that may have resulted.

<sup>40</sup> He complained in one letter of Chesterton's failure to answer a long letter he had written, 'full of good sense and good wishes': Masterman to Chesterton, 16 June, 1917, Chesterton Papers, British Library, Add. Mss. 73238 (ff. 177-8).

The plutocratic vice was largely to blame here, based as it was on personal rule. In his fictional account, plutocracy had made eccentrics the centre of press attention, as well as oral tradition. One such figure was the ‘hero Hawker’ – an oddball who had perfected the art of personal flight. The ‘dare devil’ Edwardian hero had evidently turned sour by this time, in Chesterton’s account, at least, becoming an instrument of plutocratic rule. The projection of the individual as a curiosity at best, a freak at worst, served as a distraction from the heroism of a whole class that had expended much blood on the battlefields of the world. They had not died to endure yet more regimentation in the form of Prussian social reform to maintain government by the rich; they had sacrificed themselves instead for a ‘liberty larger than they knew’.<sup>41</sup> While still championing the individual, Chesterton did so through the collective agency of ‘the people’, but a people standing well apart from government. This was everything that Wells had denounced during the war, emphasising instead the importance, in Grainger’s words, of ‘co-ordination, the integration of the individual into a system, the belated incorporation of a notoriously unincorporated people’ both in war and the peace that followed.<sup>42</sup>

It seemed to Chesterton that not just Wells but Masterman too was oblivious to this symbiosis between personal liberty and a people in permanent conflict with their rulers. While paying generous tribute to his erstwhile friend on his death in 1928, Chesterton expressed his regret that Masterman had allowed himself to be used by politicians against his better nature as a modern-day Jeremiah.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, ever the master of the biblical turn of phrase, Masterman increasingly lent his prophetic voice to causes of which Chesterton despaired. For example, two years before his death, Masterman had sought to raise the morale of Liberals, particularly young Liberals, by urging them not to be troubled about statements relating to ‘Central party chests or Central party funds. After all, these things do the Gentiles seek.’ He continued, ‘the duty of Liberalism is not to interest itself in recriminations concerning the control of the monetary subscriptions of wealthy men.’<sup>44</sup> By this time, he had become reconciled with Lloyd George, whom he had attacked bitterly for abandoning

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<sup>41</sup> Chesterton, ‘England in 1919: Being an Extract from a School History of the Period published in 1968’, *Pear’s Christmas Annual* (1919), 17-19, at 19; reprinted in *The Chesterton Review* 16 (1988), 519-29.

<sup>42</sup> Grainger, *Patriotisms*, 310, citing Wells’s *War and the Future: Italy, France and Britain at War* (London: Cassell, 1917); see especially 197-208 on the ‘Resentful Employee’ and the ‘Genteel Whig’ as the two main types in Britain who were wholly unresponsive to the call of the State as an agent of the wider human welfare embodied in the Allied cause.

<sup>43</sup> Chesterton, ‘Charles Masterman’, *G. K.’s Weekly*, VI (26 November, 1927), 775.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Seven Don’ts for Liberals,’ *Daily News*, 30 January 1926. The allusion is to Matthew, 6:31. ‘(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly father knoweth that you have need of all these things.’

the radical agenda of pre-war Liberalism as leader of the coalition government between 1918 and 1922.<sup>45</sup>

After the War, in an article of 1921, Chesterton rejected Wells's view in his latest book *The Salvaging of Civilisation* that peace between nations could be achieved by working towards a world state underpinned by an 'internationalist' literature. On the contrary, for Chesterton war was best avoided by encouraging people to read nationalist literatures – those of others as well as their own – literature that expressed the 'deepest sentiments of the most democratic States in the world'.<sup>46</sup> Since Chesterton was averse to the concept of the state, whether of a national or an international variety, he could only have been using the term advisedly, perhaps as a metaphor for his view that true democracy was expressed in literature and the human voices it uniquely embodied. But the article emphasises that the friction between Chesterton, Masterman and Wells that had been turned to creative account before the war had now become a source of deep and permanent estrangement, certainly as far as Chesterton was concerned. The Edwardian literary world had been blown apart, not so much by the war itself as the tensions that had been central to its formation and which were tightly interwoven with the unstable alliances of progressive liberalism.

Nonetheless, the arguments put forward by the three protagonists considered here still resonate today, for example in continuing debates about global government, the 'Big Society', the European Union, and devolution in the United Kingdom. All these projects are rooted in a concern to find alternative or supplementary sources of authority to the nation-state which, as we have seen, was already being challenged in the Edwardian era. The attempt by contemporary political theorists to develop a concept of world citizenship with common structures of government is much in the spirit of Wells, albeit with a more pronounced emphasis on democracy at all levels.<sup>47</sup> The movement towards European federalism enshrined in the European Union can also be seen in Wellsian terms, subject to the same qualification.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, the Big Society promoted by the Conservative Party in Britain in seeking to distance itself from its 'toxic' past has direct links to Chesterton through Phillip Blond. A self-styled 'Red Tory' whose influences include Chesterton, Blond maintains that individuals have been failed by both the market and the state, and that the

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<sup>45</sup> For Masterman's denunciation of, and subsequent reconciliation with Lloyd George, see Edward David, 'The New Liberalism of C.F.G. Masterman, 1873-1927', in *Essays in Anti-Labour History: Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain*, ed. Kenneth D. Brown (London: Archon Books, 1974), 17-41, especially 33-41.

<sup>46</sup> Chesterton, *Illustrated London News*, 4 June 1921, 738.

<sup>47</sup> See for example David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Government* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

<sup>48</sup> See for example Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, trans. M. Pensky (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 18-19.

future of democracy lies in localism.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, the idea of the nation and the nation-state that some regard as its heart has found strong support in the face of these different challenges. This echoes another dimension of Chesterton's thought, and also that of Masterman. Critics of the European Union have resisted the idea that the nation is now passé. In their view, power should not pass to supranational organisations, and that which has should be recalled. They regard such organisations as intrinsically undemocratic, serving the interests of businesses and lobbies only and lacking any basis in a *demos*, unlike nation-states, however imperfectly. The future of England-Britain gives particular cause for concern against the European 'superstate'.<sup>50</sup> At another level, the sympathetic exploration of English nationhood, in all its depth of history, culture and identity, has never been stronger, not least in response to the apparent disintegration of the United Kingdom under the pressure of devolution on the one hand, and closer European integration, on the other.<sup>51</sup> It is something in which Chesterton would have taken a special interest, given his close identification with the English throughout his life. In the continuing struggle between democracy, plutocracy, nationhood, nation-state and world state, the voices of Wells, Chesterton and Masterman can still be heard.

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<sup>49</sup> See Phillip Blond, 'The Voluntary and the Associative', *The Future of Conservatism: Values Revisited*, ed. Brian Binley *et al.* (London: ConservativeHome, 2011), 182-94; see also Matthew Taunton, 'Distributism and the City', *G. K. Chesterton, London and Modernity*, ed. Matthew Beaumont and Matthew Ingleby (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 203-28.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Daniel Hannan, *A Doomed Marriage: Britain and Europe* (London: Notting Hill Editions, 2012), 71, 33.

<sup>51</sup> For a recent history of England, rich in detail and conscious of the 'unsettling' effect of the notion of England as having its own distinctive history, see Robert Tombs, *The English and their History* (London: Harmondsworth, 2014). However, for scrutiny of the idea that the narratives of English identity in currency today are increasingly hostile to the two Unions of the United Kingdom and Europe, see M. Kenny, 'The Return of "Englishness" in British Political Culture – The End of the Unions?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53.1 (2015), 35-51.