



Tremendous Trifles

G.K. Chesterton

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Chesterton has been called the Prince of Paradox. His works include journalism, philosophy, poetry, biography, fantasy and detective stories. Chesterton has great fun satirizing the Victorian sleuths such as Sherlock Holmes. These 39 tales will delight the reader. Chesterton said that these stories just came to him like sitting still and letting them light on him like flies. Some of these tales are just for fun while other are filled with good common sense.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936) was an English literary and social critic, historian, playwright, poet, Catholic theologian, debater, mystery writer and foremost, a novelist. Among the primary achievements of Chesterton's extensive writing career are the wide range of subjects written about, the large number of genres employed, and the sheer volume of publications produced. He wrote several plays, around 80 books, several hundred poems, some 200 short stories and 4000 essays. Chesterton's writings without fail displayed wit and a sense of humor by incorporating paradox, yet still making serious comments on the world, government, politics, economics, theology, philosophy and many other topics. Chesterton uses his compilation of essays in Tremendous Trifles as a guide to reflect on everyday life. Among this collection: A Piece of Chalk -where a drawing exercise turns into a lesson on the nature of truth, Twelve Men -an explanation on why we have juries made of our peers and not professional jurors, The Dragon's Grandmother -on why we should read fairy tales to our children along with many more endearing reflections.

Tremendous Trifles Details

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Paige says

The chapter "The Red Angel" really explained why Fairy Tales are important, not just the Disney ones (which are entertaining, but to a degree harmful in that they suggest everything ends in a happy ending), but why it is important to have scary fairy tales read to children. Specifically "The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St George to kill the dragon....Exactly what the fairy tale does is this: it accustoms him for a series of clear pictures to the idea that these limitless terrors had a limit, that these shapeless enemies have enemies in the knights of God, that there is something in the universe more mystical than darkness, and stronger than strong fear."

Ali M. says

Absolutely wonderful. I've been carrying this book around at work the past couple of weeks, and reading the very short chapters ("trifles") on my breaks has been a big part of what's kept me sane. Chesterton is so good for one's perspective. He is such a healthy human being. He takes joy in the ordinary, unravelling the divine in the contents of his pocket and in the chaos of a train station. His whole premise is that there are two ways of viewing the world: as a giant, to whom the Himalayas and Niagra Falls are nothing more than specks on the landscape... or as a nymph, to whom a box garden on the balcony of a city apartment is an alien landscape, vast and unfathomable. As far as Chesterton is concerned, the latter is the only honest way of living (and I'd agree with him). The world is a strange, uncommon place, and we are uncommon creatures in it. As he writes, "The world will never starve for want of wonders, but only for want of wonder."

Grace says

These 39 essays were fascinating. G. K. Chesterton puts things in such interesting ways that both marvel and please me...I only wish I could understand his brilliance better.

One of my favorite chapters was his writing about his experience as a juror. After he entertains you a bit he lays out a powerful argument on why it is so important that juries are made up of ordinary people. "The horrible thing about all legal officials, even the best, about all judges, magistrates, barristers, detectives, and policemen is not that they are wicked,...not that they are stupid,...it is simply that they have got used to it." He says that they don't see the prisoner in the dock but the usual man in the usual place. "Our civilization has decided, and very justly decided, that determining the guilt or innocence of men is a thing too important to be trusted to trained men. It wishes for light upon that awful matter, it asks men who know nothing more of the law than I know, but who can feel the things that I felt in the jury box."

I smile at his love affair with fairy tales. He tells of a time when he was browsing and noticed so many new novels and soon grew tired looking at them until his eyes alighted on "Grimm's Fairy Tales". He says he gave an indecent cry of joy. "Here at last was a little common sense." He says that fear does not come from fairy tales; the fear comes from the universe of the soul. "What fairy tales gives the child is the first clear idea of the possible defeat of the bogey."

There is so much more. Chesterton never disappoints.
Excellent insights in each essay.

Érico Prado says

O autor narra alguns episódios de sua vida.
Como diz o título, são pequenas histórias sem relevância aparente.
No entanto, o autor empresta a elas toques de genialidade únicos e reflexões profundas, ainda que frequentemente bastante irônicas e críticas.
Aparentemente o autor é famoso por suas ácidas e contundentes críticas. Por vezes, as críticas e as conversas narradas no livro me pareceram arrogantes, demonstrando uma certa prepotência do autor.
Chamam atenção as notas de rodapé do tradutor. O autor é conhecido por ser religioso e o tradutor se aproveita de tal situação para fazer diversas referências a trechos bíblicos e outras questões religiosas em geral, o que marca o livro não necessariamente de forma positiva. Interessantes algumas outras notas, na medida em que explicam outras referências a pessoas e locais do cotidiano do autor.
O livro é bastante interessante, se destacando pela genialidade do autor e pelas reflexões germinadas de meras trivialidades.

Mary Catelli says

A collection of essays in which Chesterton holds forth on all sorts of topics -- some actually trifling, some not -- in a vast, expansive manner. Not for people not in a mood for whimsy.

An extended metaphor about the wind and the trees and the realities of life: "You cannot see a wind; you can only see that there is a wind."

A meditation on the pleasures of lying in bed, "Lying in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a coloured pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling."

The time he found himself stymied for a piece of white chalk until he remember he was sitting on a rock in Sussex -- it was made of chalk, that rock.

The time he went on a trip:

More than a month ago, when I was leaving London for a holiday, a friend walked into my flat in Battersea and found me surrounded with half-packed luggage.

"You seem to be off on your travels," he said. "Where are you going?"

With a strap between my teeth I replied, "To Battersea."

"The wit of your remark," he said, "wholly escapes me."

"I am going to Battersea," I repeated, "to Battersea via Paris, Belfort, Heidelberg, and Frankfort. My remark contained no wit. It contained simply the truth. I am going to wander over the whole world until once more I find Battersea. Somewhere in the seas of sunset or of sunrise, somewhere in the ultimate archipelago of the earth, there is one little island which I wish to find: an island with low green hills and great white cliffs. Travellers tell me that it is called England (Scotch travellers tell me that it is called Britain), and there is a rumour that somewhere in the heart of it there is a beautiful place called Battersea."

"I suppose it is unnecessary to tell you," said my friend, with an air of intellectual comparison, "that this is Battersea?"

"It is quite unnecessary," I said, "and it is spiritually untrue. I cannot see any Battersea here; I cannot see any London or any England. I cannot see that door. I cannot see that chair: because a cloud of sleep and custom has come across my eyes. The only way to get back to them is to go somewhere else; and that is the real object of travel and the real pleasure of holidays. Do you suppose that I go to France in order to see France? Do you suppose that I go to Germany in order to see Germany? I shall enjoy them both; but it is not them that I am seeking. I am seeking Battersea. The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land. Now I warn you that this Gladstone bag is compact and heavy, and that if you utter that word 'paradox' I shall hurl it at your head. I did not make the world, and I did not make it paradoxical. It is not my fault, it is the truth, that the only way to go to England is to go away from it."

And his experiences on a jury, and how he found himself on a train carrying a dead man, and much more.

Alex Sarll says

Fifty years before the New Journalism, Chesterton joyfully and openly fiddles the facts in the columns collected here. He's often in as altered a state as Hunter S T ever managed, too - albeit a far more genial visionary. Alternately, one could almost consider this a proto-blog, given the introduction in which he says a diary kept for the public, and which keeps him in bread and cheese, is the only sort he could ever keep. Either way, he puts most of his successors to shame with the grandeur and delight he can pack into a brief piece. Oddly heartening, too, to be reminded of how much remains constant over a century: even then, the Daily Mail was a byword for the worst of England.

Shawn says

A whole lot of fun

Felipe Assis says

Sabe aquele tipo de pessoa que parece enxergar as coisas (pequenas) e os fatos (irrelevantes) de forma muito própria e digeri-las de forma a torna-las algo construtivo? Então, Chesterton é desses. Que homem sábio, pqp."

Joel says

This is a collection of essays, originally printed as newspaper columns, written a century ago. The conceit is that Chesterton begins with ordinary objects and incidents, and uses them as a springboard to examine weightier matters of philosophy, religion, politics, and morality. There is a great deal of imagination here, and humor as well.

Like most philosophers, Chesterton has a tendency to let his thoughts get away from him. There are wild over-generalizations, non sequiturs, flights of fancy; I found about half the book to be nonsense (your mileage may vary.) There are a good many references to public personages who may have been well-known in England a century ago, but are unfamiliar today. These flaws are forgivable for several reasons:

- 1) Since these are short essays, there is a sharp limit to how tiresome Chesterton can become on any single issue. If you think he's full of hot air in this essay, it's just a couple pages until you reach a different one, which you may like better. Some of his longer philosophical works can be virtually unreadable if you don't share his Catholic sensibilities; his essays, however, are much easier to recommend.
- 2) Chesterton had a quick, fertile mind; he seems to keep coming up with surprising and intriguing ways of looking at the world around him. Even when I decided that I couldn't agree with his outlook, I found the experience of seeing things from his perspective worthwhile.
- 3) He also had a gift for a witty, quotable turn of phrase.

James says

Quite brilliant! Definitely worth a read. Short stories and columns; some interesting personal accounts some clearly parables. Chesterton is easy to read today. In some ways he is ahead of his time, in some ways he is a man of his time. Thoroughly enjoyable even when I disagreed with a philosophy of his.

Tracey says

The world will never starve for want of wonders ... but only for want of wonder.

– Gilbert Keith Chesterton

I do sincerely love the Early Reviewers giveaways on Librarything. It was through this that I received Tomato Rhapsody, for which I am deeply grateful; and it was through this that I received On Tremendous Trifles, by G.K. Chesterton. GKC is perhaps best known as the author of the Father Brown mysteries, but wrote so very much more – reams and sheaves and shelves, including essays for The Daily News, twenty-one of which are gathered here.

This is a small, slender trade paperback from Hesperus Press, which just feels pleasant to the hand, with its matte finish and front and back flaps. (The margins could be wider, but I'm half Scot; more words to the page I understand.) It is foreworded by Ben Schott – who is clearly someone I need to follow up on soon; the foreword was as much fun as one of the essays.

And when I say it's as much fun, that's a tremendous compliment, because these essays are great fun. I've laughed out loud reading them more often than during any other book I can think of recently; the best word I can associate with this book is "delight". A turn of phrase here, the turning upside down of a phrase there, a philosophical conceit somewhere, a purely GKC insult elsewhere – I love it.

One essay in particular, "A Piece of Chalk", was especially delightful in that I can honestly imagine it as having inspired two of the giants in my reading pantheon, Dorothy L. Sayers and J.R.R. Tolkien. For JRRT: I found myself grinning as GKC played "what have I got in my pockets" – "Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about things in my pockets. But I found it would be too long; and the age of the great epics is past..." I can just imagine a thought process whereby that subliminally influenced the beginning of the Ring story. (Then, of course, the 12th essay in the book is actually called "What I Found in My Pocket".) And for DLS: suffice to say without spoiling anything that something forgotten in this essay is almost exactly identical to something that helped give Lord Peter the tip that an artist's death was murder, no accident, in The Five Red Herrings. From what I can find, DLS certainly read Chesterton; it's no great stretch of the imagination that Tolkien did as well. I love it. (Head canon accepted!) (Also, his preference is exactly the way I like to draw, in every detail.)

Throughout, the essays provoke laughter, and nodding of my head, and blank stares as a new way of looking at things unwinds behind my eyes. They're essays about his sprained ankle – and thus the advantages of having a leg; and the wind in the trees, or is it the trees in the wind?; and a cab-man's mistake, which becomes a metaphysical question about what is real. There is the hansom cab that throws him out, and the cows which gather to consult about his strange behavior, and the croquet game which alarms him (which was one of my favorites), and, of course, his pocket contents ... I would start listing my favorite quotes, but that would encompass most of the book. What a gift and treasure this book is. Everything else I own by him just moved up a great many rungs on the "need to (re)read soon" ladder.

Wikipedia: "Chesterton is honored with a feast day on the liturgical calendar of the Episcopal Church (USA) on June 13." (Why not the 14th, which is the anniversary of his death in 1936? Oh – the 14th belongs to Basil the Great, Bishop of Cae.) But how did that happen? *Did* it happen?? I'm not seeing it on calendars I can locate online ... Perhaps it's in the works. This will bear further looking into. What fun. There's a saint I could feel utterly comfortable calling upon. Though his response might be somewhat erratic...

Jim says

G.K. Chesterton's Tremendous Trifles is one of my favorite collections of the author's essays. Published in 1909, it contained essays published in **The Daily News**, which GKC contributed to until 1913.

So many of the essays have a refreshing offhand quality, as if they were dashed off in a pub while its author was quaffing an ale. (That could be true.) Some of them are classics. Perhaps my favorites are "The Red Angel" and "The Dragon's Grandmother," both defenses of reading fairy tales. In the former, Chesterton begins:

I find that there really are human beings who think fairy tales bad for children. I do not speak

of the man in the green tie, for him I can never count truly human. But a lady has written me an earnest letter saying that fairy tales ought not to be taught to children even if they are true. She says that it is cruel to tell children fairy tales, because it frightens them. You might just as well say that it is cruel to give girls sentimental novels because it makes them cry. All this kind of talk is based on that complete forgetting of what a child is like which has been the firm foundation of so many educational schemes. If you keep bogies and goblins away from children they would make them up for themselves. One small child in the dark can invent more hells than Swedenborg. One small child can imagine monsters too big and black to get into any picture, and give them names too unearthly and cacophonous to have occurred in the cries of any lunatic. The child, to begin with, commonly likes horrors, and he continues to indulge in them even when he does not like them. There is just as much difficulty in saying exactly where pure pain begins in his case, as there is in ours when we walk of our own free will into the torture-chamber of a great tragedy. The fear does not come from fairy tales; the fear comes from the universe of the soul.

Actually, most of the essays are wonderful -- and just the thing to make you feel better if you are down in the dumps. In fact, if you have not previously read Chesterton, I recommend **Tremendous Trifles** as a good place to start reading his voluminous work.

Chase Fluhart says

Everything I love about Mr. Chesterton. Witty, rambling, pleasant, English.

Nandakishore Varma says

One thing I like about our public library is the presence of old books - I mean, really *ancient* books. The current tome from G. K. Chesterton is from 1910. I mean, the book is from before the Soviet Union and the two World Wars - and when it was published, many of today's nations didn't exist! It was like looking down a time tunnel.

G. K. Chesterton is known for the unusual sleuth Father Brown - the Catholic priest who hunts down criminals to save their souls. But this book is different. This is Chesterton the journalist being flippant about important things and profound about trivial things. And as with the Father Brown tales, this is also compellingly readable.

The title is apt. Taking a trivial incident from everyday life (missing a piece of chalk, lying idly in the bed in the morning) or a stray thought, Chesterton rambles on about life, death and the universe in general, philosophising the mundane in the most irreverent fashion. I enjoyed most of the pieces, even though some of them were too topical to the timeline of the book's publishing and therefore somewhat incomprehensible to a person who is not very astute historically. But some of them were really profound, worth savouring in one's idle moments.

Some excerpts:

Being a nation means standing up to your equals, whereas being an empire only means kicking

your inferiors.

Folk-lore means that the soul is sane, but that the universe is wild and full of marvels. Realism means that the world is dull and full of routine, but that the soul is sick and screaming. The problem of the fairy tale is - what will a healthy man do with a fantastic world? The problem of the modern novel is - what will a madman do with a dull world? In the fairy tale the cosmos goes mad; but the hero does not go mad. In the modern novels the hero is mad before the book begins, and suffers from the harsh steadiness and cruel sanity of the cosmos.

Fairy tales, then, are not responsible for producing in children fear, or any of the shapes of fear; fairy tales do not give the child the idea of the evil or the ugly; that is in the child already, because it is in the world already. Fairy tales do not give a child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon.

Leslie says

Brilliant and fun! G. K. Chesterton writes from another time, yet his wisdom resonates with me today. My favorite chapter from this collection of stories is "The Advantages of Having One Leg," from which I draw this memorable quote:

"I feel grateful for the slight sprain which has introduced this mysterious and fascinating division between one of my feet and the other. The way to love anything is to realise that it might be lost. In one of my feet I can feel how strong and splendid a foot is; in the other I can realise how very much otherwise it might have been. The moral of the thing is wholly exhilarating. This world and all our powers in it are far more awful and beautiful than even we know until some accident reminds us. If you wish to perceive that limitless felicity, limit yourself if only for a moment. If you wish to realise how fearfully and wonderfully God's image is made, stand on one leg. If you want to realise the splendid vision of all visible things-- wink the other eye."

Pedro Rocha says

Um livro maravilhoso que leva os leitores a prestar atenção à condição deslumbrante de todas as coisas. No fim de cada momento de leitura sentimo-nos compelidos a repousar os olhos sobre qualquer coisa que nos rodeie.

John says

Tremendously written essays on a vast array of trifling subjects. Brilliant and thought-provoking, yet also good humored and charming. Chesterton somehow manages to come across as being inordinately humble and likable, while still giving the impression of being one of the wisest men ever to walk the Earth. Modern intellectuals can't even come close to matching Chesterton's wit, brainpower, and literary sophistication. In

comparison, guys like Christopher Hitchens and Dinesh D'Souza seem like the Dark Ages.

Jesse Broussard says

This is simply essential reading for any fan of Chesterton. It's vintage. A collection of essays on all sorts of topics: lying in bed, forgetting white chalk, being expelled from a Hansom Cab against his will, Picking his own pockets, robbing a French restauranteur, and all sorts of typical Chesterton absent-minded brilliance. His prose here tends to be more playful than in his fiction, making him the essay writer that is the exception to Lewis' rule in *Horse and His Boy*.

I still cannot comprehend exactly how he does what he does with words. It isn't forced or strained, as he produced a staggering amount of material, he just sees the world in a wholly different way than anyone else. He knew of his reputation for paradox, but seemed somewhat exasperated by it, as he comments that he isn't the one that made the world stand on its head.

He really is a chap that I would have loved to have met, to have simply followed around, or to have been able to record what his brain did and where his imagination took him in the course of any given hour. As it is, I'm surfacing for air and reminding myself that other authors exist (paltry and pasty beings though they be after the ferocious life and blinding colour of the Fat Catholic), and then I shall dive again when my lungs can sustain me longer. Perhaps one day I shall find--and this is an eternal dream of mine--than not only have I become a good man, but a Chestertonian one: one who knows, loves and lives the absurdities of our Triune God.

Justin Achilli says

Marvelous; a case study of the outlook of a true fantasist. Chesterton sees, in beautiful simplicity, the things in the world that people take for granted yet are truly fantastical when considered on their own terms. I read an essay from this collection any time I feel like I'm in a rut and it never fails to make me smile and inspire a fresh perspective.

Aria Maher says

A collection of extremely witty and ridiculous essays by the wonderful G. K. Chesterton. Sometimes I couldn't tell exactly what point he was trying to make, but every essay is delightfully funny and smart, and will definitely get you thinking.
