

Wooden Dwellings in U. S. Odd Sight to Chesterton; New York is Tower of Babel

By G. K. CHESTERTON.
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The sharpest pleasure of a traveler is in finding the things which he did not expect, but which he might have expected to expect. I mean the things that are at once so strange and so obvious that they must have been noticed, yet somehow they have not been noted.

Thus I heard a thousand things about Jerusalem before I ever saw it; I had heard rhapsodies and disparagements of every description. Modern rationalistic critics, with characteristic consistency, had blamed it for its accumulated rubbish and its modern restoration, for its antiquated superstition and its up-to-date vulgarity. But somehow the one impression that had never pierced through their description was the simple and single impression of a city on a hill, with walls coming to the very edge of slopes that were almost as steep as walls; the turreted city which crowns a cone-shaped hill in so many medieval landscapes.

"Discovered" America. One would suppose that this was at once the plainest and most picturesque of all the facts; yet somehow in my reading I had always lost it amid a mass of minor facts that were merely details. We know that a city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid; and yet somehow it is that it is exactly the hill that is hid, though perhaps it is only hid from the wise and the understanding.

I had a similar and simple impression when I discovered America. I cannot void the phrase; for it would really seem that each man discovers it for himself.

Thus, I had heard a great deal, before I saw them, about the tall and dominant buildings of New York. I agree that they have an instant effect on the imagination, which I think is increased by the situation in which they stand, and out of which they arose. They are all the more impressive because the building, while it is vertically so vast, is horizontally almost narrow.

His View of New York. New York is an island, and has all the intensive romance of an island. It is a thing of almost infinite height upon very finite foundations. It is almost like a lighthouse upon a lonely rock. But this story of the skyscrapers which I had often heard would by itself give a curiously false impression of the freshest and most curious characteristic of American architecture.

Told only in terms of these great towers of stone and brick in the big industrial cities, the story would tend too much to an impression of something cold and colossal like the monuments of Asia. It would suggest a modern Babylon altogether too Babylonian. It would imply that the man of the New World was a sort of new Pharaoh, who built not so much a pyramid as a pagoda of pyramids. It would suggest houses built by mammoths out of mountains, the cities reared by elephants in their own elephantine school of architecture.

Is Tower of Babel. And New York does recall the most famous of all skyscrapers, the Tower of Babel. It recalls it none the less because there is no doubt about the confusion of tongues. But in truth the very reverse is true of most of the building in America. I had no sooner passed out into the suburbs of New York on the way to Boston than I began to see something else quite contrary and far more curious. I saw forests upon forests of small houses stretching away to the horizon as literal forests do; villages and towns and cities. And they were, in another sense, literally like forests. They were all made of wood.

It was almost as fantastic to an English eye as if they had been made of cardboard. I had long outlived the silly old joke that referred to Americans as if they all lived in backwoods. But, in a sense, if they do not live in the woods, they are not yet out of the wood.

Lucky to Touch Wood. I do not say this in any sense as a criticism. As it happens I am particularly fond of wood. Of all the superstitions which our fathers took lightly enough to love, the most natural seems to me the notion that it is lucky to touch wood.

Some of them affect me the less as superstition because I feel them as symbols. If humanity had really thought Friday unlucky it would have talked about had Friday instead of Good Friday. And, while I feel the thrill of 13 at a table, I am not so sure that it is the most miserable of all human fates to fill the places of the Twelve Apostles. But the idea that there was something cleansing or wholesome about the touching of wood seems to me one of those ideas which are truly popular, because they are truly poetic.

It is probable enough that the conception came originally from the healing power of the wood of the cross; but that only clinches the divine coincidence. It is like that other divine coincidence that the victim was a carpenter, who might almost have made His own cross.

Whether we take the mystical or the mythical explanation, there is obviously a very deep connection between the human working in wood and such plain and pathetic mysticism. It gives something like a touch of the holy childishness to the tale, as if that terrible engine could be a toy. In the same fashion, a child fancies that mysterious and sinister horse, which was the downfall of Troy, as something plain and stark, and perhaps spotted, like his own rocking-horse in the nursery.

Favor Rocking-Chairs. It might be said symbolically that Americans have a taste for rocking-horses; as they certainly have, taste for rocking-chairs. A flippant critic might suggest that they select rocking-chairs so that, even when they are sitting down, they need not be sitting still. Something of this restlessness in the matter, but I think the deeper significance of the rocking-chair may still be found in the deeper symbolism of the rocking-horse.

I think there is behind all this fresh and facile use of wood, a certain spirit that is childish in the good sense of the word; something that is innocent and easily pleased. It is not altogether untrue, still less it is unfriendly, to say that the landscape seems to be dotted with doll's houses. It is the true tragedy of every fallen son of Adam that he has grown too big to live in a doll's house. These things seem somehow to escape the irony of time by not even challenging it; they are too temporary even to be merely temporal.

Not Building Tombs. These people are not building tombs, they are not, as in the fine image of Mrs. Meynell's poem, merely building ruins. It is not easy to imagine the ruins of a doll's house; and that is why a doll's house is an everlasting habitation. How far it promises a political permanence is a matter for further discussion; I am only describing the mood of discovery; in which all these cottages built of lath, like the places of a pantomime, really seemed colored like the clouds of morning, which are both fugitive and eternal.

There is also in all this atmosphere that comes in another sense from the nursery. We hear much more of Americans being educated on English literature, but I think few

Americans realize how much English children have been educated on American literature. It is true, and it is inevitable, that they can only be educated on rather old-fashioned American literature.

Read American Literature. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in one of his plays, noted truly the limitation of the young American millionaire, and especially the staleness of his English culture, but there is necessarily a similar staleness in our American culture. If Mr. Shaw's young man was still talking about Matthew Arnold and not about Mr. Yeats we are rather more likely to mention Emerson than Ezra Pound.

Whether this staleness is necessarily a disadvantage is, of course, a different question. But in any case it is true that the old American books were often the books of our childhood, even in the literal sense of the books of our nursery.

I know few men in England who have not left their boyhood to some extent lost and entangled in the forests of "Huckleberry Finn." I know few women in England from the most revolutionary suffragette to the most carefully preserved early Victorian, who will not confess to having passed a happy childhood with the Little Women of Miss Alcott. "Helen's Babies" was the first and by far the best book in the modern scriptures of baby worship.

And about all the old-fashioned American literature there was an undefinable savour that satisfied and even pleased, our growing minds.

Smell of Growing Things. Perhaps it was the smell of growing things; but I am far more certain that it was not simply the smell of wood. Now that all the memory comes back to me, it seems to come back heavy in a hundred forms with the fragrance and the touch of timber. There was the perpetual reference to the woodpile, the perpetual background of the woods.

There was something crude and clean about everything; something fresh and strange about those far-off houses to which I could not then have put a name. Indeed many things became clear in this wilderness of wood, which could only be expressed in symbol and even in fantasy.

I will not go so far as to say that it shortened the transition from log cabin to White House; as if the White House were itself made of white wood (as Oliver Wendell Holmes said) "that cuts like cheese, but lasts like iron for things like these." But I will say that the experience illuminates some other lines, by Holmes himself: "Little I ask, my wants are few, I only ask a hut of stone."

For Wooden Houses. I should not have realized in England that he was already asking for a good deal even in asking for that. In the presence of this wooden world, the very combination of words seem almost a contradiction like a lot of marble, or a hovel of gold.

It was, therefore, with an almost infantile pleasure that I looked at all this promising expansion of fresh-cut timber; thought of the housing shortage at home. It was as if the logs were still living; and I might see a paling or door grow larger before my eyes.

I know not by what inconspicuous movement of the mind there swept across me, at the same moment, the thought of things ancestral and hoary with the light of ancient dawn. The last war brought back body-armor; the next war may bring back bows and arrows. And I suddenly had a memory of old wooden houses in London, and a model of Shakespeare's towns. (Copyright in Great Britain and Ireland by The New Witness.)

Lecture on Ignition Given

By Head of Cadillac Shop At the regular Cadillac school Friday evening, B. M. Cowles, shop superintendent of the J. H. Hansen Cadillac company, lectured on Cadillac ignition and wiring. Mr. Cowles was assisted by Mr. Earl Ballew, who demonstrated the parts and their action.

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Clarence A. Earl has been elected president and general manager of the Briscoe Motor corporation. During his long connection with the automobile industry, and perhaps more particularly during his service as first vice president of the Willys Overland company, Earl came to be recognized as a man who did things. His association with the Briscoe gives him ample opportunity. As the first step in an aggressive campaign, Kelly B. Jacoby has been appointed general sales manager. The Briscoe corporation has announced plans for a great expansion with increased production and aggressive sales and advertising.

Cleaning Corroded Terminals Corroded terminals are one of the most frequent causes of ignition trouble, and it is not generally known that the best agent for cleaning them is a strong solution of washing soda. After the corrosion has been removed and the terminals dried grease the parts well with cup grease of vaseline.

Leather Washers A leather washer placed underneath the metal washer not only helps to eliminate unnecessary noise, but gives a sort of elastic compression that prevents stripped threads when the bolt is a little small for its job.

Water and Tire Wear Wet rubber cuts much more easily than the same substance dry. For this reason the wise car owner does not try to speed over wet roads whereby any chance thrown sharp stones get an opportunity to do maximum damage.

New Battery and Acetylene Station Established Here

E. O. Johnson, formerly manager of the Prest-O-Light branch in Omaha, has leased the building occupied by the Battery & Supply company at 2159 Harney street to put

in a battery station, which will be known as the Mid-West Battery & Supply company. Mr. Johnson will handle Prest-O-Light batteries and tanks and acetylene equipment.

On Washing The car should never be washed direct sunlight. If the operation is not carried out in the garage the vehicle should be in the shade while being washed. The direct rays of

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For months the banks and interests concerned in the upbuilding of these properties have held ready for this new management, new cash in the amount of \$15,000,000.

To establish clear title of the properties (which has the effect of rendering these funds immediately available upon the discharge of the receivership and the consummation of the reorganization) and to insure the continuance of the present policies, a temporary receivership was consented to in the United States District Court at Detroit on Friday by all of the interests involved.

The friendly and constructive character of the action is indicated by the appointment as receiver of W. Ledyard Mitchell, who, with Arthur E. Barker, has been in active charge of the management of the properties since the reconstruction process began.

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