

Hilaire Belloc

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Summary: A brief obituary remembering the author Hilaire Belloc, his visit to the Catholic Worker, his “great zest and joy in life,” and his books on property and the state. Calls him “an apostle to this world.” (DDLW #653).

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“May the Angels Lead Thee Into Paradise”

At a time when life is cheap and casualty lists have mounted again in Korea, it is good to contemplate the long and full life of this great writer who died last month in his home in England. He visited us in 1937 when the Catholic Worker office was on Mott street and talked briefly to our Friday night meeting, and we remembered him with awe as a Johnstonian figure with a long life of fruitful and pleasurable literary activity behind him, a life of walking trips and pilgrimages, of long conversational evenings in coffeehouses, of travel in Europe and America. It was said that he walked across the United States to propose to his wife, a California girl. He was not an Englishman, though he lived his life in England. He was born of a French father and an Irish mother in Paris and he married an American. He had five children. His oldest son was killed in the first World War and his youngest in the second. There is another son living in Canada, and two daughters, one of whom, Eleanor, also visited us in New York and has been a dear correspondent since. Belloc himself served as an ambulance driver in the first world war.

We have more than often spoken of his two books, “The Servile State,” and “The Restoration of Property,” than other of his hundred or so books. But his “Path to Rome,” to our mind was his greatest, the story of a pilgrimage made on foot to St. Peter’s. His verses and sonnets, his essays on everything under the sun, show always his great zest and joy in life. He was the forerunner of our Ogden Nash, and his nonsense verse reminded one of Lewis Carrol. His interests took in the whole of life, and if we differed from him politically there were fundamental agreements that overcome any such differences. He was an apostle to this world, recognizing the importance and beauty of this life, here and now, today and tomorrow; he was the layman always, dealing with the things of the lay world, and while he saw how wrong things were in man’s world; he saw also how very good things were in God’s world, and his gratitude to God was shown in his happiness and zest. May he rest in peace.

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