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Chesterton on Lunatics.

"I once saw in an exhibition what was called an Ideal Home; also called the House of the Future; and I naturally concluded that it was a madhouse. Everything about it seemed to be designed, not only by lunatics, but for lunatics. The chairs resembled large steel mantraps; in which it was necessary to catch a man, because he was a madman.

"The tables and all such things were made of glass, so that you could see what the lunatic was doing with his left leg; if his nervous disorganization should be such that his right leg does not know what his left leg doeth. Everywhere there seemed to be, not furniture, but the skeletons of furniture; and all the movements in such a place took on the nature of a dance of death.

"This reminded me of the fact, on which I think I recently remarked in one of these notes, that certain regular and recognized types of lunatics might well be chosen as the leaders of many regular and recognized schools of modern thought.

"The ordinary madman who wants to tear off his clothes would naturally become the leader of the Nudists and The Simple Life. The ordinary madman, who says he is made of glass, would preside among the professors who are telling us that they can transmute all matter and turn it into something as transparent as a mathematical formula. The lunatic who says he is God would obviously be worshiped by the Positivists who boast that they can worship Humanity. The man who confidently assures us that he is the Emperor of China would put himself at the head of the highly modern movement for Monarchy and Dictatorship.

"Now, lest I should profit by too supercilious an assumption of sanity, it is only fair to confess that I myself have a favorite lunatic. I do not say that I exactly look to him as my leader, but I certainly look on him as having gone further along a real path of progress than I should care to go. In other words, I regard his lunacy as really containing a truth, where all the others are commonly self-flattering forms of falsehoods.

"For somebody told me a man in a madhouse had been found hitting himself on the head with a hammer; and when asked for his reason or motive, he replied, 'I do it because it's so nice when I leave off.'

"Now that lunatic in the asylum was a much more sensible man than some millions who are outside. This is not only because I think that, of the two somewhat contorted postures, there is less psychological peril in hitting yourself on the head than in patting yourself on the back. It is also because he did understand a perfectly practical piece of psychology called Contrast. Fortunately, in fact, the man with the hammer was a hard-headed man; nor was he alone among hard-headed men.

"I have heard that Indian hunters, a highly practical class, sometimes carry a log a little way on a journey, for the sake of the sense of lightness and liberty when they toss it away. I have heard of a Southerner who made a huge fire in hot weather, so that when he went out into the normal air it gave him a shock of coolness. However this may be, there is an undeveloped hope and hygiene to be found in contrast, if it were really studied.

"At this moment it is entirely neglected. Everybody thinks he can cram all pleasures on top of each other, with no contrast at all.

"And the man who hit his head with a hammer was more reasonable than the man who goes on pouring gin into a hole in his head; on the theory that because two drinks make him happy, two hundred will make him happier." -- Exchange.