

**ENGLAND: A NATION,  
BEING THE PAPERS OF  
THE PATRIOTS' CLUB**

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England: a nation, being the papers of the Patriots' Club by Lucian Oldershaw

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**LUCIAN OLDERSHAW**

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# ENGLAND: A NATION

BEING THE PAPERS OF  
THE PATRIOTS' CLUB

EDITED BY

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UNIV OF  
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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE PATRIOTIC IDEA - - - -	1
By G. K. Chesterton.	
THE ENGLISH CITY - - - -	44
By C. F. G. Masterman.	
THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE - - -	95
By R. C. K. Ensor.	
THE CASE OF IRELAND - - - -	130
By Hugh Law, M.P.	
THE CASE OF MACEDONIA - - - -	159
By Henry W. Nevinson.	
THE CASE OF SOUTH AFRICA - - -	183
By J. L. Hammond.	
PATRIOTISM AND EDUCATION - - -	200
By Reginald A. Bray, L.C.C.	
PATRIOTISM AND THE CHRISTIAN FAITH -	234
By the Rev. Conrad Noel.	
THE FACT OF THE MATTER - - - -	253
By the Editor.	

*OLD England, gracious wielder of the spell  
Of pastoral beauty, janitress benign  
Of green Arcadian temples, matron-belle  
Robed rich of rustic glory, it is well,  
Yea, past all boasting, to be son of thine.*

*Foul fall such ingrates as the spell proclaim  
A charm outworn, and in their lust of gold  
Deem thy swift conquests of sublimer fame  
Than this that shaped them—English such in name,  
Yet aliens utter both in heart and mould.*

*Stay thou green England, fill thy loins with store  
Of peasant manhood, sow thou plenteous seed  
Of such grim valour as was thine of yore,  
Be thy strong philtres aye and evermore  
The broad green woodland and the wind-swept mead!*

*GEORGE BARTRAM.*

## THE PATRIOTIC IDEA

By G. K. CHESTERTON

## I

THE scepticism of the last two centuries has attacked patriotism as it has attacked all the other theoretic passions of mankind, and in the case of patriotism the attack has been interesting and respectable because it has come from a set of modern writers who are not mere sceptics, but who really have an organic belief in philosophy and politics. Tolstoy, perhaps the greatest of living Europeans, has succeeded in founding a school which, whatever its faults (and they are neither few nor small), has all the characteristics of a great religion. Like a great religion, it is positive, it is public, above all, it is paradoxical. The Tolstoyan enjoys asserting the hardest parts of his belief with that dark and magnificent joy which has been unknown in the world for nearly four hundred years. He enjoys saying, 'No man should strike a blow even to defend his country,' in the same way that Tertullian enjoyed saying, '*Credo quia impossibile.*'



## 2 PAPERS OF THE PATRIOTS' CLUB

This important and growing sect, together with many modern intellectuals of various schools, directly impugn the idea of patriotism as interfering with the larger sentiment of the love of humanity. To them the particular is always the enemy of the general. To them every nation is the rival of mankind. To them, in not a few instances, every man is the rival of mankind. And they bear a dim and not wholly agreeable resemblance to a certain kind of people who go about saying that nobody should go to church, since God is omnipresent, and not to be found in churches.

Suppose that two men, lost upon some gray waste in rain and darkness, were to come upon the light of a porch and take shelter in some strange house, where the household entertained them pleasantly. It might be that some feast or entertainment was going forward; that private theatricals were in preparation, or progressive whist in progress. One of these travellers might lend a hand instinctively and heartily, might play his cards at whist in a fighting spirit, might black his face in theatricals and make the children laugh. And this he would do because he felt kindly towards the whole company. But the other man would say: 'I love this company so much that I dislike its being divided into factions by progressive

whist; I love so much the human face divine that I do not wish to see it obscured with soot or grease-paint; I will not take a partner for the lancers, for that would involve selecting one woman for special privilege, and I love you all alike.' The first man would undoubtedly amuse the whole company more. And would he not love the whole company more?

Every one of us has, indeed, been lost in a gray waste of eternity, and strayed to the portal of this earth, over which the lamp is the sun. We find inside the company of humanity engaged in certain ancient festivals and forms, certain competitions and distinctions. And, as in the other case, two kinds of love can be offered to that society. The prig will profess to join in their unity; the good comrade will join in their divisions.

If the stray guests see something utterly immoral in the distinctions, something utterly wicked in the ritual, doubtless they must protest; but they should never protest because the distinctions are distinctions, and therefore in one sense exclusive, or because the ritual is ritual, and therefore in one sense irrational. If the stranger in the house has a moral objection, for instance, to playing for money, he ought to decline, though he ought not to enjoy declining. But he must not ask, 'Why am I arbitrarily

#### 4 PAPERS OF THE PATRIOTS' CLUB

made a partner with So-and-so?' He must not say, 'What rational difference is there between spades and diamonds?' If he really loves his kind, he will, as far as he can, and in the great mass of things, play the parts given him. He will preserve this gay and impetuous conservatism; he will throw himself into the competitive sports of nationality; he will walk with relish in the ancient theatricals of religion.

Because the modern intellectuals who disapprove of patriotism do not do this, a strange coldness and unreality hangs about their love for men. If you ask them whether they love humanity, they will say, doubtless sincerely, that they do. But if you ask them touching any of the classes that go to make up humanity, you will find that they hate them all. They hate kings, they hate priests, they hate soldiers, they hate sailors. They distrust men of science, they denounce the middle classes, they despair of working men, but they adore humanity. Only they always speak of humanity as if it were a curious foreign nation. They are dividing themselves more and more from men to exalt the strange race of mankind. They are ceasing to be human in the effort to be humane.

The truth is, of course, that real universality is to be reached rather by convincing