

Fernando Pessoa

Chesterton lives in the atmosphere of half-truth...

Chesterton lives in that atmosphere of half-truth (in that mist of truths) from which truths come mistily. When he is right, he generally manages to be wrong.

He has defended the Catholic (Roman) faith with an admirable asymmetry which any Catholic would warmly repudiate; he has based medievalism on a repudiation of modernity which has nothing to do, even by contrast, with the Middle Ages.

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There is much more to be said for Edgar Wallace, as a clear human type, than for Bernard Shaw. Edgar Wallace sits firm on his little stool, but Shaw has fallen between all the stools. He is too witty for to-day and not witty enough for to-morrow. The essential reason is that he is a morbid human type. He uses talent for the ends of wit and gives it a sound of genius. He has a bit of each element, with a predominance of wit, which would have made him great indeed, if he had not the degrading seriousness of talent, which in him takes the untoward form of propaganda, an attitude towards life which only the unwitty generally adopt.

His propaganda has been very good propaganda, but it has, after all, been no more than propaganda. He set himself up as the advertising manager of his intentioned "ideas", and his plays are no more than the lay-outs of his advertisements. There are things quite worthy of Shaw, and sometimes better because purer, in the advertisements of the best American publicity agents; but the right intuition lies with the business men, who know that their wit will not, and need not, survive the high commercial effect and the speed of the present necessity.

s. d.

"Erostratus". in Páginas de Estética e de Teoria Literárias. Fernando Pessoa. (Textos estabelecidos e prefaciados por Georg Rudolf Lind e Jacinto do Prado Coelho.) Lisboa: Ática, 1966: 213.