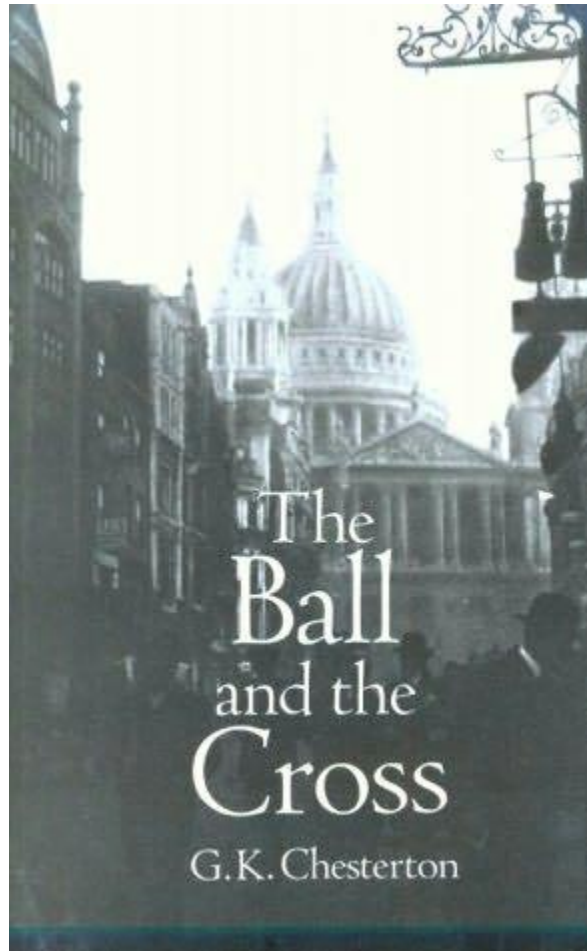


A Summary of *The Ball and the Cross* by G.K. Chesterton



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About the Author

G. K. Chesterton was an astonishingly prolific, rotund, and revered author, poet, essayist, lecturer, radio personality, playwright, biographer, religious commentator, politico, travelogue, debater, and even illustrator. Born in 1874 in London, England, he was educated at University College, though he never received a degree. In his young adulthood he was captivated by spiritualism, but he returned to the Christian faith sometime after marrying Frances Blogg in 1901. He could quote whole chapters from famous authors at will, and often demonstrated his astounding memory and wit. He converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism in 1922, which stimulated him into writing his famous biographies of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Francis of Assisi. In 1925, he began to publish his "G.K.'s Weekly," and continued to do so until his death. He died in 1936 after producing more than 100 books and numerous essays and stories, including his most famous character, the detective Father Brown. Other notable works include *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908), *Orthodoxy* (1909), *What's Wrong With the World* (1910), *The Everlasting Man* (1925), and *Autobiography* (1936).

General Overview

Evan MacIvan, a Scottish Highlander, has come to London to look for work. Instead of work, this pious young gentleman finds a blaspheming article about the Blessed Virgin in a shop window belonging to a Scottish atheist named James Turnbull. After he breaks the shop window for containing such blasphemy, MacIvan challenges Turnbull to a duel and Turnbull agrees. However, before the two can fight, the authorities break them up. They escape and try to find a secluded place to fight their duel, but no matter where they go, they are always prevented from fighting.

In the course of events, the two begin to become friends, and realize they must fight before their emotions prevent them. But once again their fight is broken up and they find themselves in an insane asylum, where even the doctors are insane. They are eventually put into solitary confinement for a month, but they manage to escape, only to be caught when they are almost free.

The two men find that the mad doctors are trying to put the whole world in the insane asylum. By this time, Turnbull has converted to Christianity, since it really is the only sane option. In the end, the inhabitants of the asylum burn the asylum to the ground and the doctors perish in the fire.

Chapter One: A Discussion Somewhat in the Air

Professor Lucifer is flying through the air in his aircraft that he created himself. He has with him a holy man named Michael, who Lucifer rudely pulled out of his backyard into the aircraft. It is Lucifer's intention to question the man to discover his beliefs and persecute Michael for them. Before they go too far, Lucifer almost crashes his spacecraft into the sphere on top of St. Paul's Cathedral.

The sphere is topped with a cross. Lucifer comments how the only the sphere is reasonable and the cross is unreasonable. Lucifer argues that the even the very shape of the cross is irrational and that the sphere should really be on top of the cross. But Michael points out that if the ball were on top of the cross, the ball would fall down.

Michael tells Lucifer that if he hates the cross and the shape of the cross, he will end up hating just about everything the world, for crosses are everywhere. This make Lucifer mad and he shoves Michael out of the aircraft. Michael manages to grab onto one of the arms of the cross. Lucifer flies away, leaving Michael to the mercy of the cross.

Michael hangs on the cross for a long time and then he channels his fear and terror into contemplation. After a while someone belonging to St. Paul's sees him, and thinking he is a lunatic, tries to get Michael to come down. The man from St. Paul's ushers Michael to safety through the church to the street below.

In the street there is the sound of breaking glass and a young man says out loud that he had to break the window because of what was said there about the Blessed Virgin. The young man turns to Michael to explain why he did what he did, but the constables arrive. The young man is taken to the magistrate, and Michael is taken to an insane asylum.

Chapter Two: The Religion of the Stipendiary Magistrate

The shop window that the young man broke belonged to the editor of "The Atheist." The editor is a man named James Turnbull, a Scottish man who likes to write controversial articles. However, it seems that the first person to have taken anything this man said seriously was the young man who broke his window.

The young man who broke the window had just come to London to look for work. He is a simple country boy, without much knowledge of London and its inhabitants. He was raised a very staunch Catholic. When Evan MacIan, that is the name of the young man, read an article in the window of the shop of "The Atheist" blaspheming the Blessed Virgin, the only sensible thing to do was to break the window. When the editor, Mr. Turnbull came out of his shop to see why his window had been broken, Evan challenged him to a duel. Turnbull was more than willing to comply with MacIan's suggestion. But there was only one problem, dueling is illegal in England and the police were already on their way to discover what was wrong.

Mr. Cumberland Vane, the magistrate, was brought to the men to solve the problem. Mr. Vane rebukes MacIan for breaking the glass of the shop. Then he rebukes MacIan for mentioning religion at all. MacIan is fined 10 pounds for the damage he did and then is set free.

After the magistrate leaves, MacIan and Turnbull swear to fight each other to the death.

Chapter Three: Some Old Curiosities

The two men go to the shop of Mr. Henry Gordon to purchase swords. After they have selected the weapons that they want, they ask Mr. Gordon if they can use his garden to fight their duel. Of course Mr. Gordon objects to this suggestion. In response, MacIan and Turnbull tie the man up and gag him. Then they go to fight in the backyard before the bound man gets loose and calls the police.

Before the duel is over, Mr. Gordon escapes and summons the police to his house. MacIan and Turnbull give up the fight when the police arrive at the house and escape over the wall of the garden and begin to run down a street.

In a few minutes a cab comes by, which the two men summon to take them to St. Pancras Station. The cabby objects, as he does not like the looks of MacIan and Turnbull, especially since they have swords in their hands. So, Turnbull pulls the cabby down out of his seat and gets in the driver's seat himself. Turnbull urges MacIan to jump inside the cab, and then they are off.

As they are driving away, Turnbull comments that their situation is a very unusual one indeed. For they are just as much enemies as they are "comrades at arms" in escaping the law.

Chapter Four: A Discussion At Dawn

While the two men are escaping into the country side, the newspapers of London are whirring. The window breaking, attempted duel and escape have caused quite a commotion and the papers are spreading the strange tale of the two men and the nature of their fight.

In the meantime, MacIan and Turnbull are overlooking London just at sunrise. The men had tossed their swords aside in favor of a picnic and Turnbull was lighting his pipe. Turnbull comments that all of London knows what they have done, and MacIan does not seem surprised at this bit of revelation from his companion. MacIan says that the papers do not understand the point of their argument.

The two decide to get as far away from London as they can before they begin to fight. But before they can start their journey, MacIan tells Turnbull that they must fight right then and there. MacIan explains to Turnbull that if they do not fight right then, they might never fight at all because MacIan is starting to like Turnbull. Just as the two men begin to fight, a man in a Panama hat appears.

Chapter Five: The Peacemaker

Just as MacIan and Turnbull are about to fight, a man dressed in hygienic white stops them. The man tells them that to spill blood is a great sin. MacIan says that murder is a sin but that there is nothing wrong with bloodshed. The man suggests that they work out their argument in a less violent manner. The man in white also says that he does not want to call the police because it is against his principles.

The man tries to argue using a Tolstoyian argument that violence will only give way to more violence and that the only solution to any problem is love. But the way in which the man talks about love is as if love were a very burdensome thing.

Since the man says that he will not call the police, MacIan and Turnbull do not see any reason why they should not continue with their fight. The man leaves disappointed. MacIan says that the man was an angel, because not more than an hour before he had prayed for an angel to strengthen his heart against Turnbull. The men begin to fight again, but not long after they hear the sound of running feet. The man in white had gone against his principles and called the police.

Chapter Six: The Other Philosopher

MacIan and Turnbull begin running from the police. They soon realize that the mounted police are after them as well, and they begin to run even faster. Both men jump over a high bank near the lane, the bank is so high that it is almost a wall. Once they are on the other side of the bank, Turnbull sees a summer-house that will suffice to hide them from the police and protect them from the night.

Once they are inside the house, the two men begin to make themselves comfortable. But before they are too comfortable, there is a loud knock at the door. They open the door and find a man standing on the threshold, who turns out to be the owner of the little house. Turnbull and MacIan explain that they are going to duel one another and that they are looking for a place to have their fight without interruption. The man becomes very excited because he has always wanted to have a fight. He invites the two men to his home where they can rest, and on the morrow, they can duel to the death in his yard.

The man's house is a little ways from the summer-house. From the outside it is a very normal looking place, but inside it is covered with all kinds of oriental decorations and weapons. The man feeds both Turnbull and MacIan well, and then lets them retire for the night.

The next morning neither Turnbull nor MacIan have seen any sign of their host after breakfast. So they decide to start their fight. As they walk outside, they find their host praying before an idol.

Their host finally introduces himself as Morrice Wimpey. He shows the two men where they can fight and tells them once again how much he likes fighting. Just before they begin, Turnbull challenges Wimpey to fight. Wimpey refuses and Turnbull becomes very mad that one thing Wimpey loves most is the source of his fear. Turnbull and MacIan chase the man with their swords into a pond. The sight of Mr. Wimpey in the dirty pond is so funny that MacIan and Turnbull sit down and laugh.

Chapter Seven: The Village of Grassley-In-The-Hole

After chasing Mr. Wimpey into the pond, Turnbull invites MacIan to a pint of beer in the village. There, over their ale, they talk about the existence of God. MacIan acknowledges the natural and the supernatural, but Turnbull does not acknowledge either. In the end, MacIan recruits a drunken townsman to help him clarify his point. To put it plainly, the drunk explains that a man is a man.

Chapter Eight: An Interlude of Argument

Turnbull and MacIan walk through the night until morning. They had talked all night long of many different and ranging things, but now the argument comes back again to God and religion.

MacIan says that he begins to understand where Turnbull is coming from. He then says that there are only two things in the world that can progress, science and the Catholic Church. MacIan also says that the reason why people often do not see the Church is because it is the only normal, sane thing in the world. The Catholic Church never changes, whereas fashions and other ideas change insanely throughout the years. The Church may appear extreme at times, but that is only because the opposing view is so extreme.

Turnbull wonders why MacIan does not exclusively associate with Christians if Christians are the only good men on this earth. MacIan says Christians are not the only good men on the earth. There are others, but Christianity gives man the opportunity to remain. MacIan uses the saints as an example; throughout all of time they are the ones that remain steady when empires fall.

Chapter Nine: The Strange Lady

Turnbull and MacIan have been walking all day and now that it is nightfall, the moon is shining in the sky. They are out in the middle of nowhere and MacIan decides that he and Turnbull must fight right there, right away. After they begin to fight they hear a cry in the night, the voice of a woman. Both men leave off fighting and go to see if they can help.

Turnbull and MacIan found a young woman in a car with her chauffeur. The chauffeur was trying to defend her from some drunken men who were trying to force the chauffeur and the lady to take them to some city. Turnbull and MacIan immediately go to the rescue. It was a good thing that they did, because the chauffeur was soon knocked unconscious. Turnbull and MacIan succeed in driving the rouges away.

The girl said that she could drive herself, but MacIan and Turnbull go along with her because the chauffeur is in no condition to protect her from anyone. As they are driving, they come to realize that they are being followed by the police. The woman thinks that it is because of her driving, but the men realize that it is because of them. Turnbull and MacIan explain why the police are after them and the woman comments that they should respect each other's beliefs. They come to a stop, and the police tell the woman that they are going to take the two men to the asylum. The lady tells the police that she wants to talk with the two men alone for a moment, but instead of talking to them, she speeds off with Turnbull and MacIan still in the car.

Chapter Ten: The Swords Rejoined

The Lady continues to speed through the night with Turnbull and MacIan in the car. Soon they come to the sea. MacIan asks the woman why she saved them from the police. The woman explains that she does not know why she decided to save either MacIan or Turnbull. She says that her life holds no pleasure for her; she is not happy. The woman explains that, to her, Turnbull and MacIan seem to know their way out of the mess of the world. She says that it would be hard to be an atheist while being so mad.

The woman drops the two men off at the gates of her home, and drives away. The men realize that the woman wanted them to fight, so they set about finding the proper place. They are close to the seashore and they see a bit of sand that would suit their purposes perfectly.

After they begin fighting, MacIan and Turnbull realize that the tide is coming in and both of them will die, for there is no way out of the cove where they are fighting. MacIan also says that it will not be a fair fight, for soon the water will be over Turnbull, who is a much shorter man than MacIan. Turnbull brushes this fact aside and continues to fight.

Finally, the sea sweeps Turnbull off his feet and MacIan dives after him in order to save him. As they tumble in the surf, MacIan finds a boat and hauls the half-drowned Turnbull over the side. Turnbull recovers in the boat and MacIan begins to row.

After rowing all night long, Turnbull and MacIan finally see land. Turnbull finds a bit of paper with French writing on it and he is overjoyed for he believes that he and MacIan have come to France. In France, they will finally be able to fight without being interrupted by anyone. They begin to fight, but no sooner than they had crossed swords than a policeman appears. The policeman orders them to stop and explains where the two men are. Apparently they are not in France, but the English island of St. Loup. With this explanation, Turnbull and MacIan begin running away from the police again.

Chapter Eleven: A Scandal in the Village

On the island of St. Loup, there is a French man by the name of Pierre Dourand, a man who returned to the Faith when he was older. Dourand has a daughter named Madeline Dourand who is a very holy and religious girl. There is a man in the village by the name of Camille Bert, and there is also a foreign count by the name of Gregory.

One day while Madeline is walking through the woods, Count Gregory, grabs her arm and makes as if to take her away. Out of the woods comes Camille to Madeline's rescue. As Camille walks Madeline back to the village, Madeline asks Camille why he does not communicate when he attends Mass. In his frustration in trying to say that Christ is really not present in Communion; Camille rips off his black beard and hair to reveal the beard and hair of Turnbull underneath. Madeline continues her argument, if the Host is only a piece of bread, why does not Turnbull eat it? His refusal to eat it seems like a confirmation of the True Presence.

Madeline reveals that she knows why MacIan, who is dressed up as the count, and Turnbull have dressed up. In trying to kidnap her, and by trying to rescue her, MacIan and Turnbull would have a legitimate reason to fight a duel.

Turnbull interrupts Madeline saying he must go because the police are coming. He grabs MacIan and the two of them run towards the sea. While they are running, they bump into a drunken man named Wilkinson who tells them they can use his yacht to get away from the police. The two men find the Gibson Girl – for that is the name of the yacht – in the nearby harbor, and they leave the island of St. Loup.

Chapter Twelve: The Desert Island

Neither Turnbull nor MacIan has had much experience with sailing. After a time, they come to an island that they assume is near America. They land there, and begin to unload the well-stocked Gibson Girl. They decide that it would be a waste not to drink all the champagne and smoke all the cigars on board, so they postpone the fight until the provisions are gone.

They look over the island a little bit and find the perfect place for their duel. While they are exploring, they come to find that the island is not an island but is attached by a strip of sand to a mainland. They decide to cross the land bridge and find out what is on the other side. There they bump into a “native.” However, after a moment or two, they realize that the native is a police man that is headed straight toward them at a full run.

Chapter Thirteen: The Garden of Peace

After MacIan and Turnbull realize that the native is a policeman, they immediately begin running again. They eventually begin to run through a forest and have well outdistanced the police. They decide to rest for a while. Later MacIan wakes Turnbull up to tell him they must move again because the Police passed them by and went thirty miles ahead, but they were on their way back now.

Dawn had come and then daylight. MacIan and Turnbull finally came to a wall that they decide to climb over in order to escape the police. Once they are on the other side of the wall, they discover a beautiful garden. A man comes up to them and MacIan and Turnbull try to explain why they are in his garden. After explaining their situation, the man tells them that he is God.

Chapter Fourteen: A Museum of Souls

Before Turnbull and MacIan can say anything, the man who thinks he is God introduces the two men to a man who thinks he is Edward VII; the man who thinks he is God explains that Edward VII is crazy. The man who thinks he is God says that he and Edward VII will be more than happy to be seconds for MacIan and Turnbull's duel. But MacIan and Turnbull do not want these men as their seconds. MacIan begins to question Edward VII about what he did while he was reigning, and Turnbull begins to ask the man who thinks he is God all the questions he always want to ask God. While they are fighting, an intimidating Dr. Quayle interrupts the interrogations. They found their way into the asylum.

MacIan explains to Turnbull that the first person to claim he was God was not Jesus Christ but Satan. He explains that the difference between these two is that Christ descended into hell and Satan was cast into it. Turnbull and MacIan hope that they can get out of the asylum, but they will first have to be examined by one of the doctors, who both men feel is mad himself. In the doctor's office, Turnbull and MacIan find out that they will not be let out of the asylum because they are thought to be mad too.

Chapter Fifteen: The Dream of MacIan

While he is in the asylum, MacIan has a very realistic dream. An aircraft comes to the asylum and the man inside tells MacIan that his sword is needed and that the king has returned to Scotland and they need MacIan's help. MacIan goes with the man in his aircraft and they come to London. There, MacIan witnesses the cruelty of the soldiers and tells the man who is driving the aircraft that they should not do that. The man calls the cruelty ‘discipline.’ MacIan begins to see that the man is speaking lies and worse yet, that the man is a very evil person. MacIan says that he will jump out of the plane, and he does.

Chapter Sixteen: The Dream of Turnbull

Like MacIan, Turnbull also has a dream. An aircraft comes to the walls of the asylum, and a very eccentric man gets out, and calls to Turnbull. The man tells Turnbull that he is wanted for the revolution. As the man takes Turnbull towards the Revolution in his aircraft, he accuses Turnbull of having been converted by MacIan, Turnbull tries to deny the statement, but he sounds unconvincing. The closer they draw to the revolution, the more dejected Turnbull becomes. When they reach the revolution, Turnbull sees the undesirables of London being destroyed; he argues that they should live because they have souls. Then Turnbull asks to be brought back to the asylum where people seem to be saner. The man refuses and Turnbull jumps out of the aircraft.

Chapter Seventeen: The Idiot

Back at the asylum, Turnbull and MacIan are brought to see Dr. Quayle again. Dr. Quayle takes the men to see the head of the asylum, a very devilish man, who sends them to solitary confinement in blocks B and C.

The cell that Turnbull is put in is so sterile that it is maddening. The shape of the cell and a strange spike in the wall is particularly bothersome to Turnbull. Turnbull finally makes a whole in a pipe so that he is able to talk to MacIan, who is in the next cell. MacIan's cell is exactly like Turnbull's cell, it even has the same spike. MacIan says that he has discovered the occupant of cell A. He found him by pulling the spike out of the wall that had bothered him so much.

The man in cell A seems to be some sort of idiot. He seems to enjoy everything about his cell that MacIan and Turnbull hate about theirs. What is even stranger is that this man does not even have a door to his cell as he has been buried alive.

After a while, Turnbull realizes that the doors to their cells are open. Somehow, when MacIan pulled the spike out of his wall, it opened the doors. The two men run out of their cells towards freedom. Sadly, the minute they set into the garden outside, they run into the head of the asylum.

Chapter Eighteen: The Riddle of Faces

Once they are in the garden, the head of the asylum, named Mr. Hutton, tells them that Parliament has just passed a law that everyone must have a certificate of sanity in order to be in public. One by one new people start appearing in the asylum, but they are all people Turnbull and MacIan have met before: Mr. Cumberland Vane and the strange lady, whose name is Beatrice Drake.

MacIan asks Beatrice what she is doing there, and she shows him her certificate of lunacy. MacIan says he is locked up because he had promised to fight Turnbull because of Beatrice.

Chapter Nineteen: The Last Parley

Turnbull meets Mr. Wilkinson who wants to know what happened to his yacht. Dr. Quayle tries to tell Turnbull that Mr. Wilkinson has a disease that deludes Wilkinson into thinking that he had a boat. Turnbull tries to explain that Wilkinson actually did have a boat. Dr. Quayle diagnoses Turnbull with a disease that deludes a person into thinking he has stolen a boat.

Turnbull tells MacIan that he is dying or dreaming. MacIan says that Turnbull is merely waking up. MacIan explains that it is the world that is mad. It is not even content to be round. The only thing that never changes is the cross.

Turnbull points out that since they both had those dreams they have not even looked for their swords. They both agree that they hate the same thing, though they both refuse to name it. A moment later, they are told to go inside the asylum or they will be fired upon.

Chapter Twenty: Dies Irae

Once Turnbull and MacIán are inside the building they meet all the people they came across during their adventures. The head of the asylum tries to tell everyone that is gathered there that the crucifixion was a myth and that the Christ and the Virgin never existed. Then he says that these people are in the asylum because they are laboring under the delusion that they were somehow involved with two men named MacIán and Turnbull. Finally, MacIán and Turnbull grab chairs and start to fight. Mr. Dourand lights the whole place on fire. The head of the asylum escapes into an aircraft with the doctors. Turnbull and MacIán remember the man in cell A and race to his rescue. They find the occupant of cell A singing on the top of his lungs. MacIán asks him to save them all from the fire. The occupant begins to walk through the flames, parting them as he goes. Everyone looks up to see an aircraft and the bodies of the two doctors flung from it. Dr. Lucifer did not get anyone after all, not even his doctors. The fire burns out and the two swords of MacIán and Turnbull are left in the shape of a cross.