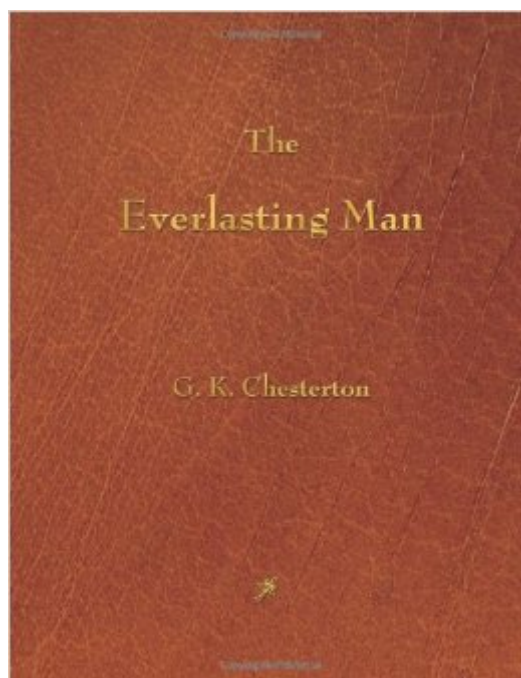


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The Everlasting Man



Synopsis

An unabridged, unaltered edition to include: Prefatory Note â “ Introduction: The Plan of This Book â “ The Man in the Cave â “ Professors and Prehistoric Men â “ The Antiquity of Civilisation â “ God and Comparative Religion â “ Man and Mythologies â “ Demons and the Philosophers â “ The War of the Gods and Demons â “ The End of the World â “ The God in the Cave â “ The Riddles of the Gospel â “ The Strangest Story in the World â “ The Witness of the Heretics â “ The Escape from Paganism â “ The Five Deaths of the Faith â “ Conclusion: The Summary of This Book â “ Appendix I: On Prehistoric Man â “ Appendix II: On Authority and Accuracy â “

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Customer Reviews

I've reread this book after ten years and found it just as astonishing a work as I did the first time around. Chesterton is a consummate apologist, combining a sincere reverence for his subject matter with a devastating sense of humour and a true generalist's erudition. He has a wonderful ability of taking accepted secular dogmas, turning them completely on their heads, and in the process making Catholic dogmas, rejected for their lack of congruence with modernism, look sensible and enlightened. This polemical mastery is one of the enduring qualities of "The Everlasting Man". Although much of the first part of the book may seem dated (it consists mostly of a friendly attack on H.G. Wells anti-Christian "Outline of History") Chesterton's points are still well taken. Many of his musings on evolution can be put to use today against the adherents of creationism as well as the scientifically arrogant. Although he takes 50 pages to say it (he IS a bit of a windbag, but his blustery style and curmudgeonly wit makes it enjoyable all the while), his point about the anthropology of his day is that it is inherently incapable of explaining the irreconcilable

chasm between man and the critters he may have materially evolved from. And this difference is constituted by Mind, or by man's soul, as manifested primarily (for Chesterton) in art and religion. One could add science. His illustrations on this point are hilarious. He draws the silly images of cows writing sonatas, sheep practising an elaborate form of ancestor worship, and dogs in solemn procession wearing canine mitres and swinging censers smouldering with dog-appealing scents. All to show the gap that separates us from the animals.

This is a book that everyone ought to read two or three times at least. It is a crime that such nonsense as *Conversations With God*, or better but still relatively shallow introductions to comparative religion like *Religions of Man*, seem to be better known. Here you will find a description of Christianity and its relation to other faiths strong and fine as aged wine. I don't know of anyone who writes with this much class in the modern world. Having ordered the book for our college library, I tried not to mark it too much, but found myself putting ink dots on paragraph after paragraph of material I wanted to quote. He rambles a bit, but I think there is more wisdom, humor, and insight in a single page of this book than in whole volumes that are better known in our days. Imagine if, after reading David Barry and laughing your head off, you wanted to go out and kiss a blade of grass or be amazed by the water running in the river instead of (say) looking up at the sky to make sure there aren't any mackerel about to fall on you. G.K.Chesterton makes his readers laugh themselves sane. And sanity is a rare and wonderful thing in the modern world. Chesterton's archeology and contemporary references are a bit dated, of course. But even there, what goes around often comes around. Chesterton leads off with a story about Grant Allen, author of a piece of heresy of that time called "Evolution of the Idea of God." More recently Karen Armstrong wrote a book with an almost identical title and thesis, "History of God," and was greeted in the press as a bold thinker. Chesterton kindly and elegantly refuted her error, and those of many other modern skeptics, decades before they were born. Admirers of Bishop Spong in particular should read this book.

Everlasting Man had a decisive role in one of the most important conversions of the this century. C.S. Lewis described reading it in 1925 when he was still an atheist: Then I read Chesterton's *Everlasting Man* and for the first time saw the whole Christian outline of history set out in a form that seemed to me to make sense . . . I already thought Chesterton the most sensible man alive "apart from his Christianity." Now, I veritably believe, I thought that Christianity itself was very sensible "apart from its Christianity." (Surprised by Joy p.223) When asked what Christian writers had helped

him, Lewis remarked in 1963, six months before he died, "The contemporary book that has helped me the most is Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*." (God in the Dock p.260.) The book has two parts. The first is titled "On the Creature called Man." It uses the available evidence from paleontology, ancient history, comparative religions, etc. but brings it together in remarkable ways. The questions he asks (and to some extent, answers) are the ones we continue to brood over: How is man different from other animals? Why are there so many religions? How do we make some sense out of our long and tumultuous human history? The questions raised in the first part receive a more definitive answer in the second: "On the Man called Christ." It is not that Jesus gives a step by step response to each of the queries. Rather he begins by throwing us into an even more perplexing quandary. Chesterton asks what it would really be like to read the Gospel free of all preconceptions. The effect would not be "gentle Jesus, meek and mild," but rather someone who jars our sensibilities.

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