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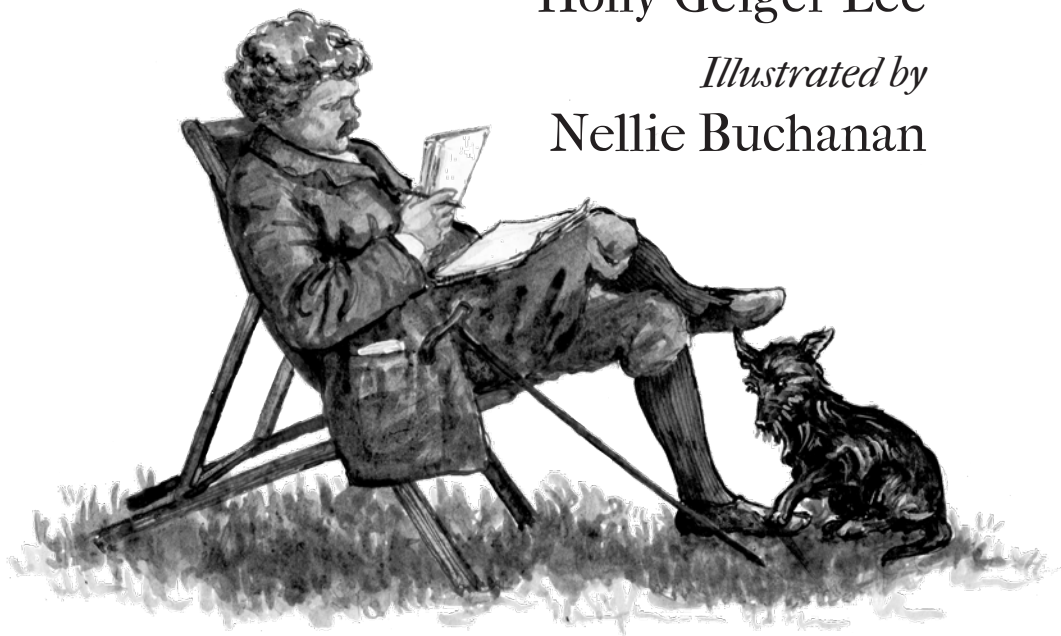
The Life of Chesterton

THE MAN WHO CARRIED A
Swordstick AND A *Pen*

Holly Geiger Lee

Illustrated by

Nellie Buchanan



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The Life of Chesterton: The Man Who Carried a Swordstick and a Pen

By Holly Geiger Lee © 2024

Illustrations by Nellie Buchanan © 2024

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Wichita, Kansas

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Scripture quotations from the King James Version.

This biography is a work of creative non-fiction for young readers; some dialogue and descriptions are imagined for narrative purposes and are not meant to be direct quotations.

Direct quotations are credited at the conclusion of this book.

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For

Andrew, Nathanael, Virginia, and Connor

– H. G. L.

To

my brother Will,

for introducing me to so many beautiful things in life,

not the least of which were

the writings of G. K. Chesterton.

– N. B.

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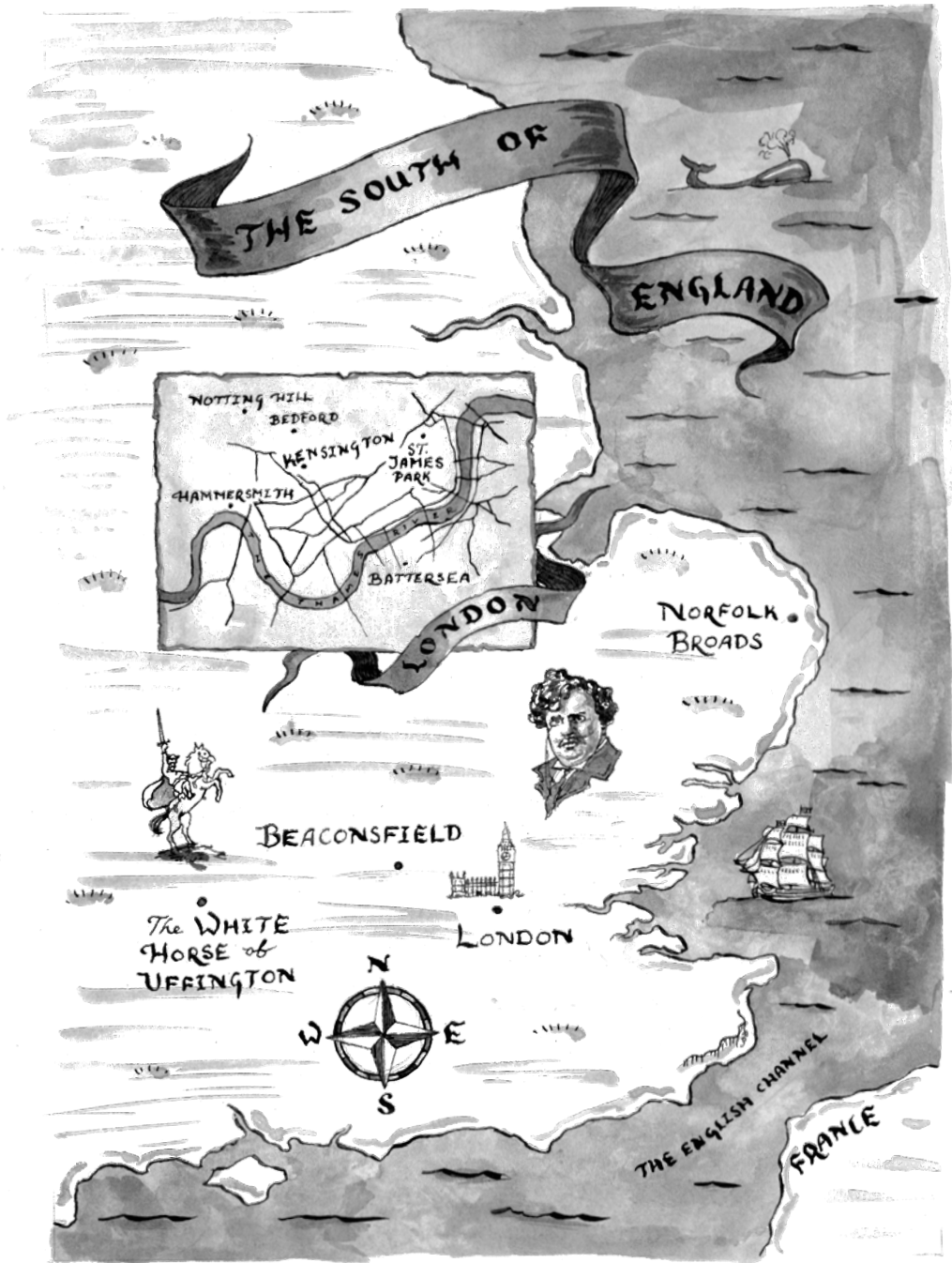
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Map of Chesterton's England





Chapter One

The Very Beginning

One autumn day in 1925, a man sat writing outside Market Harborough Railway Station. Whatever he was writing must have been amusing, because he suddenly burst into laughter. His laughter echoed against the red brick railway station building.

The man looked up from the stack of papers on his knee that would become his next book and began to stand up. He kept rising up and up, higher and higher above the platform, until he reached his full height of six feet, four inches. His signature cape was a faded gray, and his crumpled velvet hat was a midnight black.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton was anything but typical.

Always overflowing with ideas, the tall, portly man awaiting a train was well-known to his fellow Englishmen, who loved to attend his lectures and read his newspaper articles and books. He was a lover of what he called “little England.” Gilbert was inspired by an English king of old who had lived in Wessex nearly 1,000 years prior. The king, named Alfred, had had to defend his part of England from Viking invaders. King Alfred the Great had fought to protect what he had held dear: his countrymen and his culture. And like King Alfred the Great, this man was also an intellectual, a thinker, and a defender. He was a defender of truth and tradition.

When Gilbert took a stand against something, he stood firmly. However, he did it with a great respect for the opposing side.

He was a man of generous girth, weighing about 300 pounds. Swordstick in hand, cigar in mouth, and tiny glasses pinched to the tip of his nose, he put his entire body into a laugh that sang through his mustache, as he was suddenly jolted by the reality of having missed his train and having no idea whatsoever where he had been heading.

“Where on Earth am I supposed to be?”

He puzzled. He pondered. Then, he shrugged.

Minimally flustered, he made his way over to the railway ticket office to telegraph his wife. Writing down a message, he handed a slip of paper to the operator.

It read: “Am at Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?”

He decided to sit on the platform bench as he awaited his wife’s reply. Gilbert looked to his right, then up, gazing at the rail bridge. The bridge triggered a vivid memory. A long train of memories began moving through his mind, like train cars following along behind an engine.

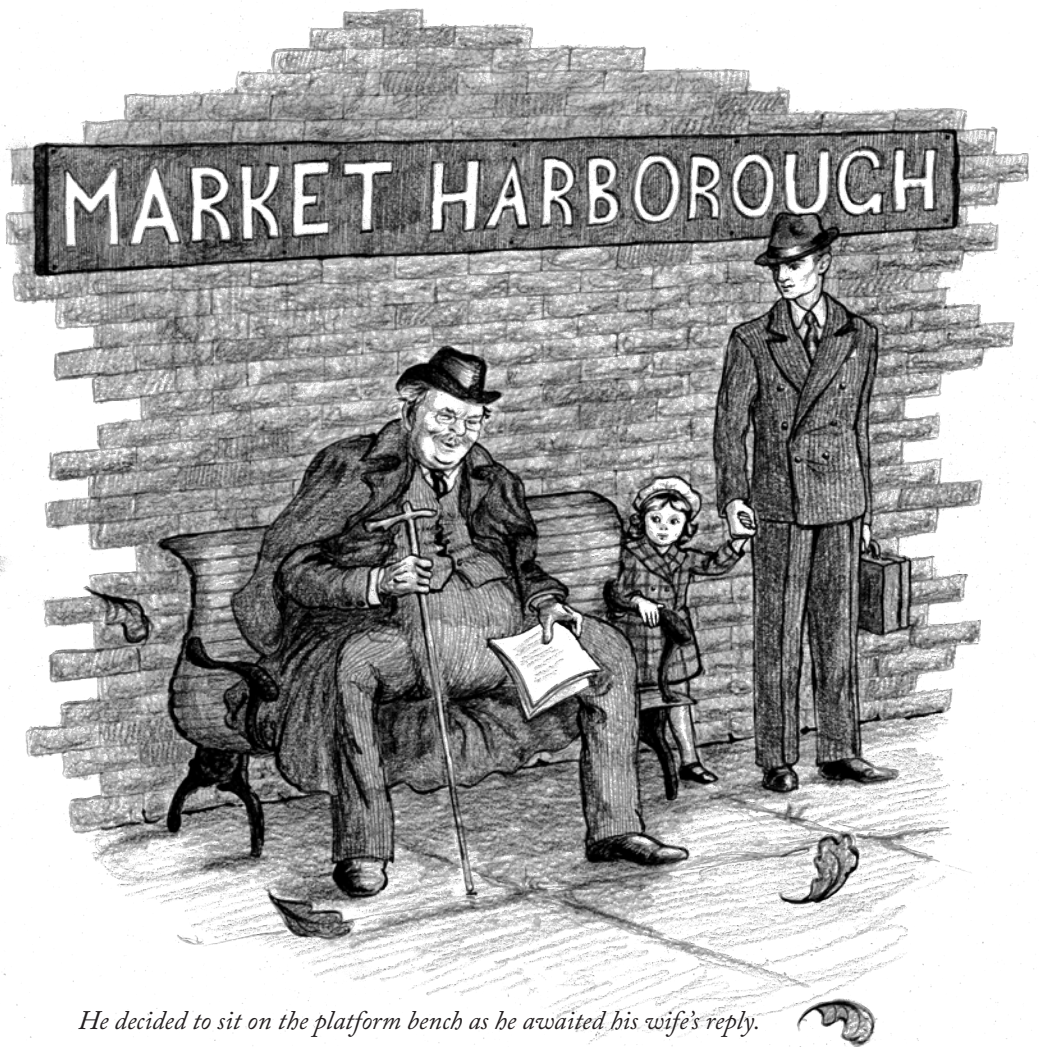
Gilbert Keith (G. K.) Chesterton thought of his first and favorite memory—the memory of his father’s toy theater.

When Queen Victoria was still on the throne, little Gilbert had gazed eye-level at a toy theater that his father, a man of a hundred hobbies, had crafted. He had looked at a tiny man walking across a bridge in the theater’s scene. The miniature man had a curly mustache, and to young Gilbert he seemed to swagger as he walked. His hand held a disproportionately large, golden key. Atop his head rested a shiny, gilded crown.

From his bench at the train station, Gilbert followed the passersby with his eyes, but his mind was back in his father’s study, fondly thinking about that enchanting man on the toy theater’s bridge. Where was that crowned man looking? At a tall castle tower. There within the castle’s single window was a young lady, gazing back at the prince on the bridge. Between the bridge and the princess in the tower, there was a deep valley, all made in miniature in his father’s little toy theater.

Gilbert liked to say that anything in childhood was a wonder. “Not merely a world full of miracles; it was a miraculous world.” Even the ordinary was extraordinary for children.

He also remembered the walks he had taken with his mother as a small boy. They would stop for a glass of milk at a dairy that had a figure of a white cow in front. That



He decided to sit on the platform bench as he awaited his wife's reply.

enormous white cow seemed magical to him. He also loved the paint shop next door. The one with gold paint and pointed, colorful chalks.

He remembered back to when the red houses on the hill near Holland Park were new. From their terraces one could look toward London, off in the distance, and spy the sunlight sparkling off the iron and glass of the Crystal Palace.

Sitting there at Market Harborough, Gilbert smiled to himself about the toy theater. The white cow at the dairy. The paint shop. The sparkle of the Crystal Palace. And the painted, white hobby-horse. He couldn't remember the particulars of the hobby-horse now. Where was he when the light streamed into a room as he watched someone painting a hobby-horse head with milky white paint? He didn't know anymore. But it was a happy memory.

Gilbert Chesterton was born on the 29th of May in 1874, fifty-one years before that day at the railway station. As a child, Gilbert was affectionately called "Diddie" by close family and friends. Diddie spent many a day in his family's London neighborhood, fighting pirates and frolicking among the jasmine, iris, and roses outside their home at 11 Warwick Gardens. Wisteria blossoms crept along the exterior walls of the brick and stucco homes on his street. The warm air smelled of roses. Kensington was abuzz with the sights and sounds of spring. There he galloped about