

# Springfield, Garand, GK & Irish Impressions

## Details

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Last night Dr.O addressed the Chesterton Society of Springfield, Massachusetts. I say "addressed" but this was hardly a standard academic lecture. The tables were littered with whiskey bottles and obscure brands of beer. The air hung heavy with pipe and cigar emissions. Those fearing the perils of secondhand smoke were right out of luck. I dropped my patented classroom drillmaster demeanor and spoke sitting in an old easy chair that looked as if it had furnished Ma Barker's Oklawaha hideout at the time Eliot Ness and his G-Men showed up with their Thompsons.

Yes, the emphasis was on conviviality in homage to GK. The event actually took place in a cavernous carriage house which adjoins a cavernous Victorian mansion along a street of Victorian mansions in this city with a glorious past and not much of a future. In the 19th century, Springfield was the firearms manufacturing capital of America and the world. In fact, firearms production dominated the Connecticut River Valley, from Springfield and Chicopee down the river to Hartford, not far to the south, where Sam Colt established his factory in 1848.

Springfield was the home of a national armory ordered by George Washington during the Revolutionary War. Another armory at Harper's Ferry, in the South, never was very successful. It was at Springfield that the use of interchangeable parts revolutionized all industry. Here, too, the Blanchard lathe was implemented to carve musket stocks uniformly. Go get a key made for your house or car and you'll see a Blanchard lathe in action, unimproved in 150 years. It was this method of complete machine-made weapons that inspired the term, "lock, stock and barrel." It was what used to be known as "Yankee ingenuity" and Springfield Armory was recognized as a world leader in firearms innovation and advanced manufacturing techniques. European ordnance officers toured the Armory, and gun production was one of the few features of America that foreigners universally admired.

The Armory reached its peak of production during World War II, delivering millions of M1 semi-automatic rifles, designed by John Cantius Garand, a French-Canadian from a huge family and bearing a great saint's name. The soft-spoken inventor is revered as a god-like figure amongst collectors of US military weapons and while not exactly a god, Garand epitomizes the type of hard-working, admirable men who

once immigrated to this nation and made good. They gave; their labor and creativity, and were a benefit to society, not a parasitic, terrorist threat.

The Armory closed in the 1960s and the workers moved off or died off. There was a demographic replacement, as occurred in Detroit and other once- thriving and productive cities. Springfield not only had many handsome homes dating from the 19th century but also lovely parks and statuary, public architecture including Carnegie libraries and, well, civilization. It's the same old story now-drugs, car-jacking, killings, no-go zones for decent human beings. I was once driving through the city and witnessed a woman(?!), big as life, relieving herself right on the sidewalk as a matter of course. From a center of technological innovation envied by the world to public defecation in one easy step. Maybe more midnight basketball and diversity indoctrination programs will help but I have my doubts.

The old Armory itself still sits like a sphinx on its hill, surrounded by an enormous iron fence while the morlocks below grunt through their existence, unaware and uncaring of what was once achieved there.

But this was supposed to be a re-cap of the Chesterton meeting and the mere fact that some of the Victorian painted ladies still stand proudly and host a handful of bitter-enders still trying to keep alive a glimmer of Western culture is some succor. Nowhere could be more appropriate for "celebrating the life" (as they say at Vatican II funerals) of GK Chesterton.

I spoke about his 1919 book, *Irish Impressions* , a retrospective of his tour of the Emerald Isle in 1918. The story is interesting and somewhat ridiculous. Some friends had asked him to work on recruiting in Ireland for the British forces. The idea was that Chesterton, very rare for an Englishman, not only admired the Irish in general but also supported independence. In addition, he was loud in denouncing his countrymen for the atrocities that had been committed in Ireland over many centuries. It seems that he should have been appealing, if any Englishman could be, but the jig was up. The Irish had joined in some numbers at the outbreak of the war but in 1916, in response to yet more English treachery, a small band of heroes rose for liberty in Dublin and elsewhere, and the British, more concerned for keeping the Irish enslaved than in fighting their German cousins, blew up the Irish capital, slaughtered civilians and murdered captured rebels.

Even the Irish, who have a reputation for hot-headedness, but are mostly sheep-docile in reality, had had enough, and the Brits weren't getting many more Paddies to die in the mud of France for their bloody butcher's apron after that. Chesterton

knew his mission was in vain but enjoyed his vacation nonetheless and used his book to once again castigate the stupidity and venality of his own people *vis a vis* the Irish.

" The mere sight of some representative Belgian priests and nuns might have produced something like a crusade. The matter seems to have been mostly left to elderly English landlords; it would be cruel to record their adventures...I heard on excellent testimony that these unhappy gentlemen had displayed throughout Ireland a poster consisting only of the Union Jack and the appeal 'Is this not your flag? Come and fight for it.' It faintly recalls something we all learnt in the Latin grammar about questions that expect the answer 'No.'"

And he reminded his readers that the British, in their relentless hatred of Catholicism, had actually abandoned their own line of monarchy to import a German, whose only qualification was that he was *not* Catholic. The love-fest between Protestant England and Protestant Germany was not ended until the commencement of the Great War.

"For the supreme joke was this: that the Englishman has not only boasted of being an Englishman, he has actually boasted of being a German. As the modern mind began to doubt the superiority of Calvinism to Catholicism, all English books, papers, and speeches were filled more and more with a Teutonism which substituted a racial for a religious superiority...Unionism was simply founded on Teutonism." GK's experiences in Belfast, a place entirely predicated on the genocide of "papist lice," as Cromwell so quaintly stated, convinced him that the entire Protestant population was unhinged.

Chesterton's final Irish Impression summed up his love of the Church and the Medieval world; his own Greetings From a Better Age

" I remembered that the men of this island had once gone forth not with the torches of conquerors or destroyers but as missionaries in the very midnight of the Dark Ages, like a multitude of moving candles that were the light of the world."