

The Ball and the Cross

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Like much of G. K. Chesterton's fiction, *The Ball and the Cross* is both witty and profound, cloaking serious religious and philosophical inquiry in sparkling humor and whimsy.

Serialized in the British publication *The Commonwealth* in 1905-06, Chesterton's second novel first appeared in book form in America in 1909, delighting and challenging readers with its heady mixture of fantasy, farce, and theology.

The plot of *The Ball and the Cross* chronicles a hot dispute between two Scotsmen, one a devout but naive Roman Catholic, the other a zealous but naive atheist. Their fanatically held opinions-leading to a duel that is proposed but never fought-inspire a host of comic adventures whose allegorical levels vigorously explore the debate between theism and atheism.

Martin Gardner's superb introduction to *The Ball and the Cross* reveals the real-life debate between Chesterton and a famous atheist that provided inspiration for the story, and it explores some of the novel's possible allegorical meanings. Appraising the book's many intriguing philosophical qualities, Mr. Gardner alerts readers as well to the pleasures of its "colorful style . . . amusing puns and clever paradoxes . . . and the humor and melodrama of its crazy plot."

Widely known as the "Prince of Paradox," G. K. Chesterton was one of the most influential English writers and thinkers of the 20th century. Chesterton's prodigious talents embraced a wide range of subjects, from philosophy and religion to detective fiction and fantasy. And while his writings are light and whimsical, they are filled with direct and honest truths.

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