# “Blue Cross”

It seems that Aristide Valentin takes the same place in the stories of G.K.Chesterton as Sherlock Holmes takes in the books by Arthur Conan Doyle and Hercule Poirot takes in Agata Christy’s novels. Still, there is a remarkable distinction between the latter characters and Valentin, which makes them principally different. All of these people are famous, experienced and successful detectives. Still, the ways they achieved their successes are diametrically opposed, as it will be demonstrated later.

The image of Valentin in the “Blue Cross” to the fullest extent corresponds to all traditions of a good story (and not only a detective story). A relatively brief Valentin’s portrait given in the very beginning and starting with the words “The was nothing notable about him,..” gives reader a maximum possibly full description of the man’s appearance and, even more, particularly character. The text is build in such a way that there’s something between the lines that tells us about the nature of Valentin.

Holmes, Poirot and a set of other well known literature characters develop and strictly obey a certain sequences of deductive rules, which altogether form the so-called “deductive method”, first mentioned by Arthur Conan Doyle but in fact confessed by ninety nine percent of all investigators in classical detective novels/stories.

Valentin prefers his own method, and the “Blue Cross” gives the brightest possible example of it. Whether such a method could be applied in the real life and what it efficiency would be then, will be considered later; now there is a point in paying attention to the Chesterton’s own words.

The following citation reflects the basic peculiarities of Valentin’s thinking: “…he was not a ‘thinking machine’; for that is a brainless phrase of modern fatalism and materialism… he was a thinking man and a plain man at the same time. All his wonderful successes, that looked like conjuring, had been gained by plodding logic, by clear and commonplace French thought… exactly because Valentin understood reason, he understood the limits of reason. Only a man who knows nothing of motors talks of motoring without petrol; only a man who knows nothing of reason talks of reasoning without strong, undisputed principles”.

The “Blue Cross” bears almost no suspense which is traditional for the stories that exploit the deductive method as the way of solving a problem. At the same time, the story fills a reader with gripping curiosity and wish to read on until the end. Why?

The task of the detective here is, on the one hand, almost primitive, and, on the other hand, almost impossible to solve. Valentin needs to find a certain person (the world-famous criminal Flambeau) in the huge city of London, with the population of several millions and of unknown to Valentin arrangement of streets, blocks and districts. There is no not only the exact information on where Flambeau could be in London but if he was there in principle – this is just a conjecture. And literally everything that is done by Valentin to find the criminal is based upon his conjectures too. The most amazing thing is that it works!

Here is how G.K.Chesterton describes the investigation method of Valentin:”…in such cases he reckoned on the unforeseen. In such cases when he could not follow the train of the reasonable, he coldly and carefully followed the train of the unreasonable. Instead of going to the right places – banks, police-stations, rendezvous – he systematically went to the wrong places; knocked at every empty house, turned down every *cul de sac*, went up every lane blocked with rubbish, went round every crescent that led him uselessly out of the way”. Valentine defended his crazy course quite logically:”…if one had a clue this was the worst way; but if one had no clue at all it was the best, because there was just the chance that any oddity that caught the eye of the pursuer might be the same that had caught the eye of the pursued”.

Logic itself is an apparatus, a machine, and it has to be fed with facts. Holmes and others did their best to catch a vanishing trace of a criminal by carefully thinking of actions the latter would carry out to escape and by putting themselves into the criminals position. Never Valentin did so. The way Valentin picks to gain facts and to track a man does not seem to be logically approved. More, it seems to be incredible, terribly inefficient. It makes reader to think that Valentin probably was very superstitious or very weird kind of detective.

As soon as Valentin runs across the criminal’s trace he sticks to it, goes along it at finally gets what he’s looking for as any other normal investigator. But prior to it is the point from which a question to Chesterton, as the “father” of Aristide Valentin, arises.

Does Chesterton really believe that it should be reasonable in real life to rely upon the pure probability of running into something related to the crime or the criminal occasionally? The system of Valentin is original, smart and, no doubt, has the right to exist among the best examples of the world detective literature. But when it comes to the reality, it inevitably loses when compared to Poirot’s and Holmes’s approaches. The most evident reason for it is that Aristide Valentin must be a pure imaginary person, a fruit of Chesterton’s fantasy with no real roots, while Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot and others all had living prototypes.

There’s one more weakness of Valentin that should be mentioned, inherent in his style of work, and noted by himself:” The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic…”. For most of his virtual colleagues, it’s visa versa: they are the artists, and they play the first violin, while most of the criminals have to follow it.

Nevertheless, while some aspects of Valentines system that can be considered as drawbacks, from literary point of view the character himself looks alive and natural, which adds to the art value of the story.