

Keeping a White Post White

THE attitude of those calling themselves conservatives, who maintain that the interests of society are best served by strict adherence to existing social institutions, is questioned by Mr. G. K. Chesterton, by no means a radical, and hardly what in the United States would be termed a "progressive." As an outspoken antagonist of Socialism he finds himself, somewhat to his distaste, in the company of reactionaries who vigorously protest against all movements looking to the improvement of social and economic conditions on the general principle that innovations are wrong. To all demands for constructive legislation designed to abolish admitted abuses the reply of the conservative is: "Leave well enough alone. See what happened in Russia when the old order was overthrown."

The desire to maintain outgrown laws and timeworn institutions because of the possible danger of destroying something of value that has come to be associated with them, meets with no sympathy from Mr. Chesterton. He

believes that society is a living growth that must either obey the laws of its being or perish. Standing still, he says, means stagnation and petrification. Even to preserve the existing social order requires constant readjustment to new conditions and influences from without and within.

To the conservative's plea that things be left as they are, for fear that worse evils may come, Mr. Chesterton replies: "But what if things will not remain as they are? Here is a post painted white. Leave it alone, advise the opponents of reform. Don't try to paint it some other color. So we shall always have a white post." But that, points out Mr. Chesterton, is exactly what they will not have. Left to the influence of wind, dust, and rain, your white post soon becomes gray, and in time black. To keep it white it must be repainted. Letting things alone does not guarantee against change.

Dan Beard, artist and head of the admirable Boy Scout organization, has pictured in a cartoon the mistaken idea of the conservative that there would be no labor troubles or social disturbances if it were not for the radical agitators who stir up strife. In the middle of a broad, smooth-flowing stream he depicted an upthrown mass of rock, solid, unyielding; around which the water swirls and foams. The rock is the conservative, whose objection to the passing of the river causes the turbulent rapids. The real disturber is the immovable object. The worst enemy of existing institutions is not the fantastic theorist who wants to make the world anew overnight, but the stubborn reactionary who clings to old forms long after they have outlived their usefulness.