



Biography of Hilaire Belloc

Joseph Hilaire Pierre René Belloc was an Anglo-French writer and historian who became a British subject in 1902. He was one of the most prolific writers in England during the early twentieth century. He was known as a writer, orator, poet, man of letters and political activist. He is most notable for his Catholic faith, which had a strong impact on most of his works. He was President of the Oxford Union and later MP for Salford from 1906 to 1910. His most lasting legacy is probably his verse, which encompasses cautionary tales and religious poetry. Among his best-remembered poems are *Jim, who ran away from his nurse, and was eaten by a lion* and *Matilda, who told lies and was burnt to death!*

Belloc was born in La Celle-Saint-Cloud, France (next to Versailles and near Paris) to a French father and English mother and grew up in England. Much of his boyhood was spent in Slindon, West Sussex, for which he often felt homesick in later life.

His mother Elizabeth Rayner Parkes (1829-1925) was also a writer, and a great-granddaughter of the English chemist Joseph Priestley. In 1867 she married attorney Louis Belloc, son of the French painter Jean-Hilaire Belloc. In 1872, five years after they wed, Louis died, but not before being wiped out financially in a stock market crash. The young widow then brought her son Hilaire, along with his sister, Marie, back to England where he remained, except for his voluntary enlistment as a young man in the French artillery. After being educated at John Henry Newman's Oratory School Belloc served his military service, as a French citizen, with an artillery regiment near Toul in 1891. He was powerfully built, with great stamina, and walked extensively in Britain and Europe. While courting his future wife Elodie, whom he first met in 1890, the penniless Belloc walked a good part of the way from the midwest of the United States to her home in northern California, paying for lodging at remote farm houses and ranches by sketching the owners and reciting poetry.

After his military service, Belloc proceeded to Balliol College, Oxford, as a History scholar. He went on to obtain first class honours in History. In 1896, he married Elodie Hogan, an American. In 1906 he purchased land and a house called King's Land at Shipley, West Sussex where he brought up his family and lived until shortly before his death. Elodie and Belloc had five children before her 1914 death from influenza. After her death, Belloc wore mourning for the remainder of his life, keeping her room exactly as she had left it.

His son Louis was killed in 1918 while serving in the Royal Flying Corps in northern France. Belloc placed a memorial tablet in the Cathedral at nearby Cambrai. Belloc suffered a stroke in 1941 and never recovered from its effects. He died on 16 July 1953 in Guildford, Surrey, following a fall. He is buried at the Shrine of Our Lady, where he had regularly attended Mass as a parishioner. At his funeral Mass, homilist Monsignor Ronald Knox observed, "No man of his time fought so hard for the good things."