

BY THE BABE UNBORN

AND

OTHER POEMS

G. K. CHESTERTON

Freeeditorial 

By the Babe Unborn

If trees were tall and grasses short,
As in some crazy tale,
If here and there a sea were blue
Beyond the breaking pale,

If a fixed fire hung in the air
To warm me one day through,
If deep green hair grew on great hills,
I know what I should do.

In dark I lie; dreaming that there
Are great eyes cold or kind,
And twisted streets and silent doors,
And living men behind.

Let storm clouds come: better an hour,
And leave to weep and fight,
Than all the ages I have ruled
The empires of the night.

I think that if they gave me leave
Within the world to stand,
I would be good through all the day
I spent in fairyland.

They should not hear a word from me
Of selfishness or scorn,
If only I could find the door,
If only I were born.

Elegy in a Country Churchyard

The men that worked for England
They have their graves at home:
And bees and birds of England
About the cross can roam.

But they that fought for England,
Following a falling star,
Alas, alas for England
They have their graves afar.

And they that rule in England,
In stately conclave met,
Alas, alas for England,
They have no graves as yet.

Ecclesiastes

There is one sin: to call a green leaf gray,
Whereat the sun in heaven shuddereth.
There is one blasphemy: for death to pray,
For God alone knoweth the praise of death.

There is one creed: 'neath no world-terror's wing
Apples forget to grow on apple-trees.
There is one thing is needful everything
The rest is vanity of vanities.

Cyclopean

A mountainous and mystic brute
No rein can curb, no arrow shoot,

Upon whose doomed deformed back
I sweep the planets' scorching track.

Old is the elf, and wise, men say,
His hair grows green as ours grows grey;
He mocks the stars with myriad hands,
High as that swinging forest stands.

But though in pigmy wanderings dull
I scour the deserts of his skull,
I never find the face, eyes, teeth,
Lowering or laughing underneath.

I met my foe in an empty dell,
His face in the sun was naked hell.
I thought, 'One silent, bloody blow,
No priest would curse, no crowd would know.'

Then cowered: a daisy, half concealed,
Watched for the fame of that poor field;
And in that flower and suddenly
Earth opened its one eye on me.

Antichrist, or the Reunion of Christendom: An Ode

Are they clinging to their crosses,
F. E. Smith,
Where the Breton boat-fleet tosses,
Are they, Smith?
Do they, fasting, trembling, bleeding,
Wait the news from this our city?
Groaning "That's the Second Reading!"
Hissing "There is still Committee!"
If the voice of Cecil falters,
If McKenna's point has pith,
Do they tremble for their altars?
Do they, Smith?

Russian peasants round their pope
Huddled, Smith,
Hear about it all, I hope,
Don't they, Smith?
In the mountain hamlets clothing
Peaks beyond Caucasian pales,
Where Establishment means nothing
And they never heard of Wales,
Do they read it all in Hansard --
With a crib to read it with --
"Welsh Tithes: Dr. Clifford answered."
Really, Smith?

In the lands where Christians were,
F. E. Smith,
In the little lands laid bare,
Smith, O Smith!
Where the Turkish bands are busy
And the Tory name is blessed
Since they hailed the Cross of Dizzy
On the banners from the West!
Men don't think it half so hard if
Islam burns their kin and kith,
Since a curate lives in Cardiff
Saved by Smith.

It would greatly, I must own,
Soothe me, Smith!
If you left this theme alone,
Holy Smith!
For your legal cause or civil
You fight well and get your fee;
For your God or dream or devil
You will answer, not to me.
Talk about the pews and steeples
And the cash that goes therewith!
But the souls of Christian peoples...
Chuck it, Smith!

An Answer to Frances Cornford

Why do you rush through the fields in trains,
Guessing so much and so much.
Why do you flash through the flowery meads,
Fat-head poet that nobody reads;
And why do you know such a frightful lot
About people in gloves and such?

Americanisation

Britannia needs no Boulevards,
No spaces wide and gay:
Her march was through the crooked streets
Along the narrow way.
Nor looks she where, New York's seduction,
The Broadway leadeth to destruction.

Britannia needs no Cafes:
If Coffee needs must be,
Its place should be the Coffee-house
Where Johnson growled for Tea;
But who can hear that human mountain
Growl for an ice-cream soda-fountain?

She needs no Russian Theatrey
Mere Father strangles Mother,
In scenes where all the characters
And colours kill each other--
Her boast is freedom had by halves,
And Britons never shall be Slavs.

But if not hers the Dance of Death,

Great Dostoievsky's dance,
And if the things most finely French
Are better done in France--
Might not Americanisation
Be best applied to its own nation?

Ere every shop shall be a store
And every Trade a Trust . . .
Lo, many men in many lands
Know when their cause is just.
There will be quite a large attendance
When we Declare our Independence.

A Word

A word came forth in Galilee, a word like to a star;
It climbed and rang and blessed and burnt wherever
brave hearts are;
A word of sudden secret hope, of trial and increase
Of wrath and pity fused in fire, and passion kissing
peace.
A star that o'er the citied world beckoned, a sword of
flame;
A star with myriad thunders tongued: a mighty word
there came.

The wedge's dart passed into it, the groan of timber
wains,
The ringing of the river nails, the shrieking of the
planes;
The hammering on the roofs at morn, the busy workshop
roar;
The hiss of shavings drifted deep along the windy
floor;
The heat browned toiler's crooning song, the hum of
human worth
Mingled of all the noise of crafts, the ringing word

went forth.

The splash of nets passed into it, the grind of sand
and shell,
The boat-hook's clash, the boas-oars' jar, the cries to
buy and sell,
The flapping of the landed shoals, the canvas crackling
free,
And through all varied notes and cries, the roaring of
the sea,
The noise of little lives and brave, of needy lives and
high;
In gathering all the throes of earth, the living word
went by.

Earth's giants bowed down to it, in Empire's huge
eclipse,
When darkness sat above the thrones, seven thunders on
her lips,
The woes of cities entered it, the clang of idols'
falls,
The scream of filthy Caesars stabbed high in their
brazen halls,
The dim hoarse floods of naked men, the world-realms'
snapping girth,
The trumpets of Apocalypse, the darkness of the earth:
The wrath that brake the eternal lamp and hid the
eternal hill,

A world's destruction loading, the word went onward
still-
The blaze of creeds passed into it, the hiss of horrid
fires,
The headlong spear, the scarlet cross, the hair-shirt
and the briars,
The cloistered brethren's thunderous chaunt, the errant
champion's song,
The shifting of the crowns and thrones, the tangle of
the strong.

The shattering fall of crest and crown and shield and
cross and cope,
The tearing of the gauds of time, the blight of prince
and pope,
The reign of ragged millions leagued to wrench a loaded
debt,
Loud with the many-throated roar, the word went forward
yet.
The song of wheels passed into it, the roaring and the
smoke,
The riddle of the want and wage, the fogs that burn and
choke.

The breaking of the girths of gold, the needs that
creep and swell,
The strengthening hope, the dazing light, the deafening
evangel,
Through kingdoms dead and empires damned, through
changes without cease,
With earthquake, chaos, born and fed, rose,-and the
word was 'Peace.'

Eternities

I cannot count the pebbles in the brook.
Well hath He spoken: "Swear not by thy head.
Thou knowest not the hairs," though He, we read,
Writes that wild number in His own strange book.

I cannot count the sands or search the seas,
Death cometh, and I leave so much untrod.
Grant my immortal aureole, O my God,
And I will name the leaves upon the trees,

In heaven I shall stand on gold and glass,
Still brooding earth's arithmetic to spell;

Or see the fading of the fires of hell
Ere I have thanked my God for all the grass.

Femina Contra Mundum

The sun was black with judgment, and the moon
Blood: but between
I saw a man stand, saying: 'To me at least
The grass is green.

'There was no star that I forgot to fear
With love and wonder.
The birds have loved me'; but no answer came --
Only the thunder.

Once more the man stood, saying: 'A cottage door,
Wherethrough I gazed
That instant as I turned -- yea, I am vile;
Yet my eyes blazed.

'For I had weighed the mountains in a balance,
And the skies in a scale,
I come to sell the stars -- old lamps for new --
Old stars for sale.'

Then a calm voice fell all the thunder through,
A tone less rough:
'Thou hast begun to love one of my works
Almost enough.'