

FOR A WAR MEMORIAL

AND

OTHER POEMS

G. K. CHESTERTON

***Free***editorial 

## **For a War Memorial**

(SUGGESTED INSCRIPTION PROBABLY NOT SUGGESTED BY THE COMMITTEE)

The hucksters haggle in the mart  
The cars and carts go by;  
Senates and schools go droning on;  
For dead things cannot die.

A storm stooped on the place of tombs  
With bolts to blast and rive;  
But these be names of many men  
The lightning found alive.

If usurers rule and rights decay  
And visions view once more  
Great Carthage like a golden shell  
Gape hollow on the shore,

Still to the last of crumbling time  
Upon this stone be read  
How many men of England died  
To prove they were not dead.

## **Gloria in Profundis**

There has fallen on earth for a token  
A god too great for the sky.  
He has burst out of all things and broken  
The bounds of eternity:  
Into time and the terminal land  
He has strayed like a thief or a lover,  
For the wine of the world brims over,

Its splendour is spilt on the sand.

Who is proud when the heavens are humble,  
Who mounts if the mountains fall,  
If the fixed stars topple and tumble  
And a deluge of love drowns all-  
Who rears up his head for a crown,  
Who holds up his will for a warrant,  
Who strives with the starry torrent,  
When all that is good goes down?

For in dread of such falling and failing  
The fallen angels fell  
Inverted in insolence, scaling  
The hanging mountain of hell:  
But unmeasured of plummet and rod  
Too deep for their sight to scan,  
Outrushing the fall of man  
Is the height of the fall of God.

Glory to God in the Lowest  
The spout of the stars in spate-  
Where thunderbolt thinks to be slowest  
And the lightning fears to be late:  
As men dive for sunken gem  
Pursuing, we hunt and hound it,  
The fallen star has found it  
In the cavern of Bethlehem.

## **Gold Leaves**

Lo! I am come to autumn,  
When all the leaves are gold;  
Grey hairs and golden leaves cry out  
The year and I are old.

In youth I sought the prince of men,

Captain in cosmic wars,  
Our Titan, even the weeds would show  
Defiant, to the stars.

But now a great thing in the street  
Seems any human nod,  
Where shift in strange democracy  
The million masks of God.

In youth I sought the golden flower  
Hidden in wood or wold,  
But I am come to autumn,  
When all the leaves are gold.

### **Here is the Little Door**

Here is the little door, lift up the latch, oh lift!  
We need not wander more but enter with our gift;  
Our gift of finest gold,  
Gold that was never bought nor sold;  
Myrrh to be strewn about his bed;  
Incense in clouds about his head;  
All for the Child who stirs not in his sleep.  
But holy slumber holds with ass and sheep.

Bend low about his bed, for each he has a gift;  
See how his eyes awake, lift up your hands, O lift!  
For gold, he gives a keen-edged sword  
(Defend with it Thy little Lord!),  
For incense, smoke of battle red.  
Myrrh for the honoured happy dead;  
Gifts for his children terrible and sweet,  
Touched by such tiny hands and  
Oh such tiny feet.

## Jealousy

'The Roman Catholic Church has never forgiven us for converting Sir Arthur Conan Doyle from his Agnosticism; and when Men like Mr. Dennis Bradley can no longer be Content with the old Faith, a Spirit of Jealousy is naturally roused.'

-A Spiritualist Paper

She sat upon her Seven Hills  
She rent the scarlet robes about her,  
Nor yet in her two thousand years  
Had ever grieved that men should doubt her;  
But what new horror shakes the mind  
Making her moan and mutter madly;  
Lo! Rome's high heart is broken at last  
Her foes have borrowed Dennis Bradley.

If she must lean on lesser props  
Of earthly fame or ancient art,  
Make shift with Raphael and Racine  
Put up with Dante and Descartes,  
Not wholly can she mask her grief  
But touch the wound and murmur sadly,  
'These lesser things are theirs to love  
Who lose the love of Mr. Bradley.'

She saw great Origen depart  
And Photius rend the world asunder,  
Her cry to all the East rolled back  
In Islam its ironic thunder,  
She lost Jerusalem and the North  
Accepting these arrangements gladly  
Until it came to be a case  
Of Conan Doyle v. Dennis Bradley.

O fond and foolish hopes that still  
In broken hearts unbroken burn,

What if, grown weary of new ways,  
The precious wanderer should return  
The Trumpet whose uncertain sound  
Has just been cracking rather badly  
May yet within her courts remain  
His Trumpet-blown by Dennis Bradley.

His and her Trumpet blown before  
The battle where the good cause wins  
Louder than all the Irish harps  
Or the Italian violins;  
When armed and mounted like St. Joan  
She meets the mad world riding madly  
Under the Oriflamme of old  
Crying, 'Mont-joie St. Dennis Bradley!'

But in this hour she sorrows still,  
Though all anew the generations  
Rise up and call her blessed, claim  
Her name upon the new born Nations  
But still she mourns the only thing  
She ever really wanted badly;  
The sympathy of Conan Doyle  
The patronage of Dennis Bradley.

## **Lepanto**

White founts falling in the Courts of the sun,  
And the Soldan of Byzantium is smiling as they run;  
There is laughter like the fountains in that face of  
all men feared,  
It stirs the forest darkness, the darkness of his  
beard;  
It curls the blood-red crescent, the crescent of his  
lips;  
For the inmost sea of all the earth is shaken with his  
ships.

They have dared the white republics up the capes of  
Italy,  
They have dashed the Adriatic round the Lion of the  
Sea,  
And the Pope has cast his arms abroad for agony and  
loss,  
And called the kings of Christendom for swords about  
the Cross.  
The cold queen of England is looking in the glass;  
The shadow of the Valois is yawning at the Mass;  
From evening isles fantastical rings faint the Spanish  
gun,  
And the Lord upon the Golden Horn is laughing in the  
sun.

Dim drums throbbing, in the hills half heard,  
Where only on a nameless throne a crownless prince has  
stirred,  
Where, risen from a doubtful seat and half attained  
stall,  
The last knight of Europe takes weapons from the wall,  
The last and lingering troubadour to whom the bird has  
sung,  
That once went singing southward when all the world was  
young.  
In that enormous silence, tiny and unafraid,  
Comes up along a winding road the noise of the Crusade.  
Strong gongs groaning as the guns boom far,  
Don John of Austria is going to the war,  
Stiff flags straining in the night-blasts cold  
In the gloom black-purple, in the glint old-gold,  
Torchlight crimson on the copper kettle-drums,  
Then the tuckets, then the trumpets, then the cannon,  
and he comes.  
Don John laughing in the brave beard curled,  
Spurning of his stirrups like the thrones of all the  
world,  
Holding his head up for a flag of all the free.  
Love-light of Spain--hurrah!  
Death-light of Africa!

Don John of Austria  
Is riding to the sea.

Mahound is in his paradise above the evening star,  
(Don John of Austria is going to the war.)  
He moves a mighty turban on the timeless houri's knees,  
His turban that is woven of the sunsets and the seas.  
He shakes the peacock gardens as he rises from his  
ease,  
And he strides among the tree-tops and is taller than  
the trees;  
And his voice through all the garden is a thunder sent  
to bring  
Black Azrael and Ariel and Ammon on the wing.  
Giants and the Genii,  
Multiplex of wing and eye,  
Whose strong obedience broke the sky  
When Solomon was king.

They rush in red and purple from the red clouds of the  
morn,  
From the temples where the yellow gods shut up their  
eyes in scorn;  
They rise in green robes roaring from the green hells  
of the sea  
Where fallen skies and evil hues and eyeless creatures  
be,  
On them the sea-valves cluster and the grey sea-forests  
curl,  
Splashed with a splendid sickness, the sickness of the  
pearl;  
They swell in sapphire smoke out of the blue cracks of  
the ground,--  
They gather and they wonder and give worship to  
Mahound.  
And he saith, "Break up the mountains where the hermit-  
folk can hide,  
And sift the red and silver sands lest bone of saint  
abide,  
And chase the Giaours flying night and day, not giving



rest,  
For that which was our trouble comes again out of the  
west.  
We have set the seal of Solomon on all things under  
sun,  
Of knowledge and of sorrow and endurance of things  
done.  
But a noise is in the mountains, in the mountains, and  
I know  
The voice that shook our palaces--four hundred years  
ago:  
It is he that saith not 'Kismet'; it is he that knows  
not Fate;  
It is Richard, it is Raymond, it is Godfrey at the  
gate!  
It is he whose loss is laughter when he counts the  
wager worth,  
Put down your feet upon him, that our peace be on the  
earth."  
For he heard drums groaning and he heard guns jar,  
(Don John of Austria is going to the war.)  
Sudden and still--hurrah!  
Bolt from Iberia!  
Don John of Austria  
Is gone by Alcalar.

St. Michaels on his Mountain in the sea-roads of the  
north  
(Don John of Austria is girt and going forth.)  
Where the grey seas glitter and the sharp tides shift  
And the sea-folk labour and the red sails lift.  
He shakes his lance of iron and he claps his wings of  
stone;  
The noise is gone through Normandy; the noise is gone  
alone;  
The North is full of tangled things and texts and  
aching eyes,  
And dead is all the innocence of anger and surprise,  
And Christian killeth Christian in a narrow dusty room,  
And Christian dreadeth Christ that hath a newer face of

doom,  
And Christian hateth Mary that God kissed in Galilee,--  
But Don John of Austria is riding to the sea.  
Don John calling through the blast and the eclipse  
Crying with the trumpet, with the trumpet of his lips,  
Trumpet that sayeth ha!  
Domino gloria!  
Don John of Austria  
Is shouting to the ships.

King Philip's in his closet with the Fleece about his  
neck  
(Don John of Austria is armed upon the deck.)  
The walls are hung with velvet that is black and soft  
as sin,  
And little dwarfs creep out of it and little dwarfs  
creep in.  
He holds a crystal phial that has colours like the  
moon,  
He touches, and it tingles, and he trembles very soon,  
And his face is as a fungus of a leprous white and grey  
Like plants in the high houses that are shuttered from  
the day,  
And death is in the phial and the end of noble work,  
But Don John of Austria has fired upon the Turk.  
Don John's hunting, and his hounds have bayed--  
Booms away past Italy the rumour of his raid.  
Gun upon gun, ha! ha!  
Gun upon gun, hurrah!  
Don John of Austria  
Has loosed the cannonade.

The Pope was in his chapel before day or battle broke,  
(Don John of Austria is hidden in the smoke.)  
The hidden room in man's house where God sits all the  
year,  
The secret window whence the world looks small and very  
dear.  
He sees as in a mirror on the monstrous twilight sea  
The crescent of his cruel ships whose name is mystery;

They fling great shadows foe-wards, making Cross and  
Castle dark,  
They veil the plumèd lions on the galleys of St. Mark;  
And above the ships are palaces of brown, black-bearded  
chiefs,  
And below the ships are prisons, where with  
multitudinous griefs,  
Christian captives sick and sunless, all a labouring  
race repines  
Like a race in sunken cities, like a nation in the  
mines.  
They are lost like slaves that sweat, and in the skies  
of morning hung  
The stair-ways of the tallest gods when tyranny was  
young.  
They are countless, voiceless, hopeless as those fallen  
or fleeing on  
Before the high Kings' horses in the granite of  
Babylon.  
And many a one grows witless in his quiet room in hell  
Where a yellow face looks inward through the lattice of  
his cell,  
And he finds his God forgotten, and he seeks no more a  
sign--  
(But Don John of Austria has burst the battle-line!)  
Don John pounding from the slaughter-painted poop,  
Purpling all the ocean like a bloody pirate's sloop,  
Scarlet running over on the silvers and the golds,  
Breaking of the hatches up and bursting of the holds,  
Thronging of the thousands up that labour under sea  
White for bliss and blind for sun and stunned for  
liberty.

Vivat Hispania!  
Domino Gloria!  
Don John of Austria  
Has set his people free!

Cervantes on his galley sets the sword back in the  
sheath

(Don John of Austria rides homeward with a wreath.)  
And he sees across a weary land a straggling road in  
Spain,  
Up which a lean and foolish knight for ever rides in  
vain,  
And he smiles, but not as Sultans smile, and settles  
back the blade....  
(But Don John of Austria rides home from the Crusade.)

### **Modern Elfland**

I cut a staff in a churchyard copse,  
I clad myself in ragged things,  
I set a feather in my cap  
That fell out of an angel's wings.

I filled my wallet with white stones,  
I took three foxgloves in my hand,  
I slung my shoes across my back,  
And so I went to fairyland.

But lo, within that ancient place  
Science had reared her iron crown,  
And the great cloud of steam went up  
That telleth where she takes a town.

But cowed with smoke and starred with lamps,  
That strange land's light was still its own;  
The word that witched the woods and hills  
Spoke in the iron and the stone.

Not Nature's hand had ever curved  
That mute unearthly porter's spine.  
Like sleeping dragon's sudden eyes  
The signals leered along the line.

The chimneys thronging crooked or straight

Were fingers signalling the sky;  
The dog that strayed across the street  
Seemed four-legged by monstrosity.

'In vain,' I cried, 'though you too touch  
The new time's desecrating hand,  
Through all the noises of a town  
I hear the heart of fairyland.'

I read the name above a door,  
Then through my spirit pealed and passed:  
'This is the town of thine own home,  
And thou hast looked on it at last.'

***Freeditorial*** 