

THE BLACK VIRGIN

AND

OTHER POEMS

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Freeeditorial 

The Black Virgin

One in thy thousand statues we salute thee
On all thy thousand thrones acclaim and claim
Who walk in forest of thy forms and faces
Walk in a forest calling on one name
And, most of all, how this thing may be so
Who know thee not are mystified to know
That one cries "Here she stands" and one cries "Yonder"
And thou wert home in heaven long ago.

Burn deep in Bethlehem in the golden shadows,
Ride above Rome upon the horns of stone,
From low Lancastrian or South Saxon shelters
Watch through dark years the dower that was shine own:
Ghost of our land, White Lady of Walsinghame,
Shall they not live that call upon thy name
If an old song on a wild wind be blowing
Crying of the holy country whence they came?

Root deep in Chartres the roses blown of glass
Burning above thee in the high vitrailles,
On Cornish crags take for salute of swords
O'er peacock seas the far salute of sails,
Glooming in bronze or gay in painted wood,
A great doll given when the child is good,
Save that She gave the Child who gave the doll,
In whom all dolls are dreams of motherhood.

I have found thee like a little shepherdess
Gay with green ribbons; and passed on to find
Michael called Angel hew the Mother of God
Like one who fills a mountain with a mind:
Molten in silver or gold or garbed in blue,
Or garbed in red where the inner robe burns through,
Of the King's daughter glorious within:
Change shine unchanging light with every hue.

Clothed with the sun or standing on the moon
Crowned with the stars or single, a morning star,
Sunlight and moonlight are thy luminous shadows,
Starlight and twilight thy refractions are,
Lights and half-lights and all lights turn about thee,

But though we dazed can neither see nor doubt thee,
Something remains. Nor can man live without it
Nor can man find it bearable without thee.

There runs a dark thread through the tapestries
That time has woven with all the tints of time
Something not evil but grotesque and groping,
Something not clear; not final; not sublime;
Quaint as dim pattern of primal plant or tree
Or fish, the legless elfins of the sea,
Yet rare as this shine image in ebony
Being most strange in its simplicity.

Rare as the rushing of the wild black swans
The Romans saw; or rocks remote and grim
Where through black clouds the black sheep runs accursed
And through black clouds the Shepherd follows him.
By the black oak of the aeon-buried grove
By the black gems of the miner's treasure-trove
Monsters and freaks and fallen stars and sunken-
Most holy dark, cover our uncouth love.

From shine high rock look down on Africa
The living darkness of devouring green
The loathsome smell of life unquenchable,
Look on low brows and blinking eyes between,
On the dark heart where white folk find no place,
On the dark bodies of an antic race,
On all that fear thy light and love thy shadow,
Turn thou the mercy of thy midnight face.

This also is in thy spectrum; this dark ray;
Beyond the deepening purples of thy Lent
Darker than violet vestment; dark and secret
Clot of old night yet cloud of heaven sent:
As the black moon of some divine eclipse,
As the black sun of the Apocalypse,
As the black flower that blessed Odysseus back
From witchcraft; and he saw again the ships.

In all thy thousand images we salute thee,
Claim and acclaim on all thy thousand thrones
Hewn out of multi-colored rocks and risen
Stained with the stored-up sunsets in all tones-
If in all tones and shades this shade I feel,
Come from the black cathedrals of Castille

Climbing these flat black stones of Catalonia,
To thy most merciful face of night I kneel.

The Convert

After one moment when I bowed my head
And the whole world turned over and came upright,
And I came out where the old road shone white,
I walked the ways and heard what all men said,
Forests of tongues, like autumn leaves unshed,
Being not unlovable but strange and light;
Old riddles and new creeds, not in despite
But softly, as men smile about the dead.

The sages have a hundred maps to give
That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree,
They rattle reason out through many a sieve
That stores the sand and lets the gold go free:
And all these things are less than dust to me
Because my name is Lazarus and I live.

The Higher Unity

The Rev. Isaiah Bunter has disappeared into the interior of the Solomon Islands, and it is feared that he may have been devoured by the natives, as there has been a considerable revival of religious customs among the Polynesians.--A real paragraph from a real Paper; only the names altered.

It was Isaiah Bunter
Who sailed to the world's end,
And spread religion in a way
That he did not intend.

He gave, if not the gospel-feast,
At least a ritual meal;
And in a highly painful sense
He was devoured with zeal.

And who are we (as Henson says)
That we should close the door?
And should not Evangelicals
All jump at shedding Gore?

And many a man will melt in man,
Becoming one, not two,
When smacks across the startled earth
The Kiss of Kikuyu.

When Man is the Turk, and the Atheist,
Essene, Erastian, Whig,
And the Thug and the Druse and the Catholic
And the crew of the Captain's gig.

The Great Minimum

It is something to have wept as we have wept,
It is something to have done as we have done,
It is something to have watched when all men slept,
And seen the stars which never see the sun.

It is something to have smelt the mystic rose,
Although it break and leave the thorny rods,
It is something to have hungered once as those
Must hunger who have ate the bread of gods.

To have seen you and your unforgotten face,
Brave as a blast of trumpets for the fray,
Pure as white lilies in a watery space,
It were something, though you went from me today.

To have known the things that from the weak are
furled,
Perilous ancient passions, strange and high;
It is something to be wiser than the world,
It is something to be older than the sky.

In a time of sceptic moths and cynic rusts,
And fattened lives that of their sweetness tire
In a world of flying loves and fading lusts,
It is something to be sure of a desire.

Lo, blessed are our ears for they have heard;
Yea, blessed are our eyes for they have seen:
Let the thunder break on man and beast and bird
And the lightning. It is something to have been.

The Englishman

St George he was for England,
And before he killed the dragon
He drank a pint of English ale
Out of an English flagon.
For though he fast right readily
In hair-shirt or in mail,
It isn't safe to give him cakes
Unless you give him ale.

St George he was for England,
And right gallantly set free
The lady left for dragon's meat
And tied up to a tree;
But since he stood for England
And knew what England means,
Unless you give him bacon
You mustn't give him beans.

St George he is for England,
And shall wear the shield he wore
When we go out in armour
With battle-cross before.
But though he is jolly company
And very pleased to dine,
It isn't safe to give him nuts
Unless you give him wine.

The Donkey

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood,
Then surely I was born;

With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil's walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

The Deluge

Though giant rains put out the sun,
Here stand I for a sign.
Though earth be filled with waters dark,
My cup is filled with wine.
Tell to the trembling priests that here
Under the deluge rod,
One nameless, tattered, broken man
Stood up, and drank to God.

Sun has been where the rain is now,
Bees in the heat to hum,
Haply a humming maiden came,
Now let the deluge come:
Brown of aureole, green of garb,
Straight as a golden rod,
Drink to the throne of thunder now!
Drink to the wrath of God.

High in the wreck I held the cup,
I clutched my rusty sword,
I cocked my tattered feather

To the glory of the Lord.
Not undone were the heaven and earth,
This hollow world thrown up,
Before one man had stood up straight,
And drained it like a cup.

The Holy of Holies

'Elder father, though thine eyes
Shine with hoary mysteries,
Canst thou tell what in the heart
Of a cowslip blossom lies?

'Smaller than all lives that be,
Secret as the deepest sea,
Stands a little house of seeds,
Like an elfin's granary.

'Speller of the stones and weeds,
Skilled in Nature's crafts and creeds,
Tell me what is in the heart
Of the smallest of the seeds.'

'God Almighty, and with Him
Cherubim and Seraphim,
Filling all eternity—
Adonai Elohim.'

The Horrible History of Jones

Jones had a dog; it had a chain;
Not often worn, not causing pain;
But, as the I.K.L. had passed
Their 'Unleashed Cousins Act' at last,
Inspectors took the chain away;
Whereat the canine barked 'Hooray!'
At which, of course, the S.P.U.

(Whose Nervous Motorists' Bill was through)
Were forced to give the dog in charge
For being Audibly at Large.
None, you will say, were now annoyed,
Save, haply, Jones - the yard was void.
But something being in the lease
About 'alarms to aid the police,'
The U.S.U. annexed the yard
For having no sufficient guard.
Now if there's one condition
The C.C.P. are strong upon
It is that every house one buys
Must have a yard for exercise;
So Jones, as tenant, was unfit,
His state of health was proof of it.
Two doctors of the T.T.U.'s
Told him his legs, from long disuse,
Were atrophied; and saying 'So
From step to higher step we go
Till everything is New and True.'
They cut his legs off and withdrew.
You know the E.T.S.T.'s views
Are stronger than the T.T.U.'s:
And soon (as one may say) took wing
The Arms, though not the Man, I sing.
To see him sitting limbless there
Was more than the K.K. could bear.
'In mercy silence with all speed
That mouth there are no hands to feed;
What cruel sentimentalist,
O Jones, would doom thee to exist -
Clinging to selfish Selfhood yet?
Weak one! Such reasoning might upset
The Pump Act, and the accumulation
Of all constructive legislation;
Let us construct you up a bit - '
The head fell off when it was hit:
Then words did rise and honest doubt,
And four Commissioners sat about
Whether the slash that left him dead
Cut off his body or his head.

An author in the Isle of Wight
Observed with unconcealed delight
A land of just and old renown
Where Freedom slowly broadened down

From Precedent to Precedent.
And this, I think, was what he meant.

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