



Poems (Annotated)

G. K. Chesterton

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A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather, Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul when we were boys together. Science announced nonentity and art admired decay; The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay. Round us in antic order their crippled vices came— Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame. Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom, Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a plume. Life was a fly that faded, and death a drone that stung; The world was very old indeed when you and I were young. They twisted even decent sin to shapes not to be named: Men were ashamed of honour; but we were not ashamed. Weak if we were and foolish, not thus we failed, not thus; When that black Baal blocked the heavens he had no hymns from us. Children we were—our forts of sand were even as weak as we, High as they went we piled them up to break that bitter sea. Fools as we were in motley, all jangling and absurd, When all church bells were silent our cap and bells were heard. Not all unhelped we held the fort, our tiny flags unfurled; Some giants laboured in that cloud to lift it from the world. I find again the book we found, I feel the hour that flings Far out of fish-shaped Paumanok some cry of cleaner things; And the Green Carnation withered, as in forest fires that pass, Roared in the wind of all the world ten million leaves of grass; Or sane and sweet and sudden as a bird sings in the rain Truth out of Tusitala spoke and pleasure out of pain. Yea, cool and clear and sudden as a bird sings in the grey, Dunedin to Samoa spoke, and darkness unto day, But we were young; we lived to see God break their bitter charms, God and the good Republic come riding back in arms: We have seen the city of Mansoul, even as it rocked, relieved—Blessed are they who did not see, but being blind, believed. This is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells, And none but you shall understand the true thing that it tells— Of what colossal gods of shame could cow men and yet crash, Of what huge devils hid the stars, yet fell at a pistol flash. The doubts that were so plain to chase, so dreadful to withstand— Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand? The doubts that drove us through the night as we two talked amain, And day had broken on the streets e'er it broke upon the brain. Between us, by the peace of God, such truth can now be told; Yea, there is strength in striking root, and good in growing old. We have found common things at last, and marriage and a creed. And I may safely write it now, and you may safely read.

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