

FOR THE TIME BEING

A Christmas Oratorio

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IN MEMORIAM
CONSTANCE ROSALIE AUDEN
1870-1941
(1907-1973)

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin,
that grace may abound? God forbid.*

ROMANS VI

ADVENT

I

CHORUS

Darkness and snow descend;
The clock on the mantelpiece
Has nothing to recommend,
Nor does the face in the glass
Appear nobler than our own
As darkness and snow descend
On all personality.
Huge crowds mumble—"Alas,
Our angers do not increase,
Love is not what she used to be";
Portly Caesar yawns—"I know";
He falls asleep on his throne,
They shuffle off through the snow:
Darkness and snow descend.

SEMI-CHORUS

Can great Hercules keep his
Extraordinary promise
To reinvigorate the Empire?
Utterly lost, he cannot
Even locate his task but
Stands in some decaying orchard
Or the irregular shadow
Of a ruined temple, aware of
Being watched from the horrid mountains
By fanatical eyes yet
Seeing no one at all, only hearing

The silence softly broken
By the poisonous rustle
Of famishing Arachne.

CHORUS

Winter completes an age
With its thorough levelling;
Heaven's tourbillions of rage
Abolish the watchman's tower
And delete the cedar grove.
As winter completes an age,
The eyes huddle like cattle, doubt
Seeps into the pores and power
Ebbs from the heavy signet ring;
The prophet's lantern is out
And gone the boundary stone,
Cold the heart and cold the stove,
Ice condenses on the bone:
Winter completes an age.

SEMI-CHORUS

Outside the civil garden
Of every day of love there
Crouches a wild passion
To destroy and be destroyed.
O who to boast their power
Have challenged it to charge? Like
Wheat our souls are sifted
And cast into the void.

CHORUS

The evil and armed draw near;
The weather smells of their hate

And the houses smell of our fear;
Death has opened his white eye
And the black hole calls the thief
As the evil and armed draw near.
Ravens alight on the wall,
Our plans have all gone awry,
The rains will arrive too late,
Our resourceful general
Fell down dead as he drank
And his horses died of grief,
Our navy sailed away and sank;
The evil and armed draw near.

II

NARRATOR

If, on account of the political situation,
There are quite a number of homes without roofs, and men
Lying about in the countryside neither drunk nor asleep,
If all sailings have been cancelled till further notice,
If it's unwise now to say much in letters, and if,
Under the subnormal temperatures prevailing,
The two sexes are at present the weak and the strong,
That is not at all unusual for this time of year.
If that were all we should know how to manage. Flood, fire,
The desiccation of grasslands, restraint of princes,
Piracy on the high seas, physical pain and fiscal grief,
These after all are our familiar tribulations,
And we have been through them all before, many, many times.
As events which belong to the natural world where
The occupation of space is the real and final fact
And time turns round itself in an obedient circle,

They occur again and again but only to pass
 Again and again into their formal opposites,
 From sword to ploughshare, coffin to cradle, war to work,
 So that, taking the bad with the good, the pattern composed
 By the ten thousand odd things that can possibly happen
 Is permanent in a general average way.

Till lately we knew of no other, and between us we seemed
 To have what it took—the adrenal courage of the tiger,
 The chameleon's discretion, the modesty of the doe,
 Or the fern's devotion to spatial necessity:
 To practise one's peculiar civic virtue was not
 So impossible after all; to cut our losses
 And bury our dead was really quite easy: That was why
 We were always able to say: "We are children of God,
 And our Father has never forsaken His people."

But then we were children: That was a moment ago,
 Before an outrageous novelty had been introduced
 Into our lives. Why were we never warned? Perhaps we were.
 Perhaps that mysterious noise at the back of the brain
 We noticed on certain occasions—sitting alone
 In the waiting room of the country junction, looking
 Up at the toilet window—was not indigestion
 But this Horror starting already to scratch Its way in?
 Just how, just when It succeeded we shall never know:
 We can only say that now It is there and that nothing
 We learnt before It was there is now of the slightest use,
 For nothing like It has happened before. It's as if
 We had left our house for five minutes to mail a letter,
 And during that time the living room had changed places
 With the room behind the mirror over the fireplace;
 It's as if, waking up with a start, we discovered

Ourselves stretched out flat on the floor, watching our shadow
 Sleepily stretching itself at the window. I mean
 That the world of space where events re-occur is still there,
 Only now it's no longer real; the real one is nowhere
 Where time never moves and nothing can ever happen:
 I mean that although there's a person we know all about
 Still bearing our name and loving himself as before,
 That person has become a fiction; our true existence
 Is decided by no one and has no importance to love.

That is why we despair; that is why we would welcome
 The nursery bogey or the winecellar ghost, why even
 The violent howling of winter and war has become
 Like a juke-box tune that we dare not stop. We are afraid
 Of pain but more afraid of silence; for no nightmare
 Of hostile objects could be as terrible as this Void.
 This is the Abomination. This is the wrath of God.

III

CHORUS

Alone, alone, about a dreadful wood
 Of conscious evil runs a lost mankind,
 Dreading to find its Father lest it find
 The Goodness it has dreaded is not good:
 Alone, alone, about our dreadful wood.

Where is that Law for which we broke our own,
 Where now that Justice for which Flesh resigned
 Her hereditary right to passion, Mind
 His will to absolute power? Gone. Gone.
 Where is that Law for which we broke our own?

The Pilgrim Way has led to the Abyss.
Was it to meet such grinning evidence
We left our richly odoured ignorance?
Was the triumphant answer to be this?
The Pilgrim Way has led to the Abyss.

We who must die demand a miracle.
How could the Eternal do a temporal act,
The Infinite become a finite fact?
Nothing can save us that is possible:
We who must die demand a miracle.

IV

RECITATIVE

If the muscle can feel repugnance, there is still a false move
to be made;
If the mind can imagine to-morrow, there is still a defeat
to remember;
As long as the self can say "I", it is impossible not to rebel;
As long as there is an accidental virtue, there is a necessary vice:
And the garden cannot exist, the miracle cannot occur.

For the garden is the only place there is, but you will not find it
Until you have looked for it everywhere and found nowhere that is
not a desert;
The miracle is the only thing that happens, but to you it will not
be apparent,
Until all events have been studied and nothing happens that you
cannot explain;
And life is the destiny you are bound to refuse until you have
consented to die.

Therefore, see without looking, hear without listening, breathe
without asking;
The Inevitable is what will seem to happen to you purely by chance;
The Real is what will strike you as really absurd;
Unless you are certain you are dreaming, it is certainly a dream
of your own;
Unless you exclaim—"There must be some mistake"—you must
be mistaken.

V

CHORUS

O where is that immortal and nameless Centre from
which our points of
Definition and death are all equi-distant? Where
The well of our wish to wander, the everlasting fountain
Of the waters of joy that our sorrow uses for tears?
O where is the garden of Being that is only known in Existence
As the command to be never there, the sentence by which
Alephs of throbbing fact have been banished into position,
The clock that dismisses the moment into the turbine of time?

O would I could mourn over Fate like the others, the
resolute creatures,
By seizing my chance to regret. The stone is content
With a formal anger and falls and falls; the plants are indignant
With one dimension only and can only doubt
Whether light or darkness lies in the worse direction; and the subtler
Exiles who try every path are satisfied
With proving that none have a goal: why must Man also acknowledge
It is not enough to bear witness, for even protest is wrong?

Earth is cooled and fire is quenched by his unique excitement,
 All answers expire in the clench of his questioning hand,
 His singular emphasis frustrates all possible order:
 Alas, his genius is wholly for envy; alas,
 The vegetative sadness of lakes, the locomotive beauty
 Of choleric beasts of prey, are nearer than he
 To the dreams that deprive him of sleep, the powers that compel
him to idle,
 To his amorous nymphs and his sanguine athletic gods.

How can his knowledge protect his desire for truth from illusion?
 How can he wait without idols to worship, without
 Their overwhelming persuasion that somewhere, over the high hill,
 Under the roots of the oak, in the depths of the sea,
 Is a womb or a tomb wherein he may halt to express
some attainment?

How can he hope and not dream that his solitude
 Shall disclose a vibrating flame at last and entrust him forever
 With its magic secret of how to extemporise life?

THE ANNUNCIATION

I

THE FOUR FACULTIES

Over the life of Man
 We watch and wait,
 The Four who manage
 His fallen estate:
 We who are four were
 Once but one,

Before his act of
 Rebellion;
 We were himself when
 His will was free,
 His error became our
 Chance to be.

Powers of air and fire,
 Water and earth,
 Into our hands is given
 Man from his birth:

INTUITION

As a dwarf in the dark of
 His belly I rest;

FEELING

A nymph, I inhabit
 The heart in his breast;

SENSATION

A giant, at the gates of
 His body I stand;

THOUGHT

His dreaming brain is
 My fairyland.

TUTTI

Invisible phantoms,
 The forms we assume are
 Adapted to each
 Individual humour,

Beautiful facts or true
Generalisations,
Test cases in Law or
Market quotations:
As figures and formulae
Chemists have seen us,
Who to true lovers were
Putti of Venus.

Ambiguous causes
Of all temptation,
We lure men either
To death or salvation:
We alone may look over
The wall of that hidden
Garden whose entrance
To him is forbidden;
Must truthfully tell him
What happens inside,
But what it may mean he
Alone must decide.

II

THOUGHT

The garden is unchanged, the silence is unbroken.
Truth has not yet intruded to possess
Its empty morning nor the promised hour
Shaken its lasting May.

INTUITION

The human night,

Whose messengers we are, cannot dispel
Its wanton dreams, and they are all we know.

SENSATION

My senses are still coarse
From late engrossment in a fair. Old tunes
Reiterated, lights with repeated winks,
Were fascinating like a tic and brought
Whole populations running to a plain,
Making its lush alluvial meadows
One boisterous preposter. By the river
A whistling crowd had waited many hours
To see a naked woman swim upstream;
Honours and reckless medicines were served
In booths where interest was lost
As easily as money; at the back,
In a wet vacancy among the ash cans,
A waiter coupled sadly with a crow.

FEELING

I have but now escaped a raging landscape:
There woods were in a tremor from the shouts
Of hunchbacks hunting a hermaphrodite;
A burning village scampered down a lane;
Insects with ladders stormed a virgin's house;
On a green knoll littered with picnics
A mob of horses kicked a gull to death.

INTUITION

Remembrance of the moment before last
Is like a yawning drug. I have observed
The sombre valley of an industry
In dereliction. Conduits, ponds, canals,

Distressed with weeds; engines and furnaces
 At rust in rotting sheds; and their strong users
 Transformed to spongy heaps of drunken flesh.
 Deep among dock and dusty nettle lay
 Each ruin of a will; manors of mould
 Grew into empires as a westering sun
 Left the air chilly; not a sound disturbed
 The autumn dusk except a stertorous snore
 That over their drowned condition like a sea
 Wept without grief.

THOUGHT

My recent company
 Was worse than your three visions. Where I was,
 The haunting ghosts were figures with no ground,
 Areas of wide omission and vast regions
 Of passive colour; higher than any squeak,
 One note went on for ever; an embarrassed sum
 Stuck on the stutter of a decimal,
 And points almost coincident already
 Approached so slowly they could never meet.
 There nothing could be stated or constructed:
 To Be was an archaic nuisance.

INTUITION

Look. There is someone in the garden.

FEELING

The garden is unchanged, the silence is unbroken
 For she is still walking in her sleep of childhood:
 Many before
 Have wandered in, like her, then wandered out

Unconscious of their visit and unaltered,
 The garden unchanged, the silence unbroken:
 None may wake there but One who shall be woken.

THE ANGEL GABRIEL

Wake.

III

GABRIEL

Mary, in a dream of love
 Playing as all children play,
 For unsuspecting children may
 Express in comic make-believe
 The wish that later they will know
 Is tragic and impossible;
 Hear, child, what I am sent to tell:
 Love wills your dream to happen, so
 Love's will on earth may be, through you,
 No longer a pretend but true.

MARY

What dancing joy would whirl
 My ignorance away?
 Light blazes out of the stone,
 The taciturn water
 Bursts into music,
 And warm wings throb within
 The motionless rose:
 What sudden rush of Power
 Commands me to command?

GABRIEL

When Eve, in love with her own will,
 Denied the will of Love and fell,
 She turned the flesh Love knew so well
 To knowledge of her love until
 Both love and knowledge were of sin:
 What her negation wounded, may
 Your affirmation heal to-day;
 Love's will requires your own, that in
 The flesh whose love you do not know,
 Love's knowledge into flesh may grow.

MARY

My flesh in terror and fire
 Rejoices that the Word
 Who utters the world out of nothing,
 As a pledge of His word to love her
 Against her will, and to turn
 Her desperate longing to love,
 Should ask to wear me,
 From now to their wedding day,
 For an engagement ring.

GABRIEL

Since Adam, being free to choose,
 Chose to imagine he was free
 To choose his own necessity,
 Lost in his freedom, Man pursues
 The shadow of his images:
 To-day the Unknown seeks the known;
 What I am willed to ask, your own
 Will has to answer; child, it lies

Within your power of choosing to
 Conceive the Child who chooses you.

IV

SOLO AND CHORUS

Let number and weight rejoice.
 In this hour of their translation
 Into conscious happiness:
 For the whole in every part,
 The truth at the proper centre
 (*There's a Way. There's a Voice.*)
 Of language and distress
 Is recognized in her heart
Singing and dancing.

Let even the great rejoice.
 Though buffeted by admirers
 And arrogant as noon,
 The rich and the lovely have seen
 For an infinitesimal moment
 (*There's a Way. There's a Voice.*)
 In another's eye till their own
 Reflection came between,
Singing and dancing.

Let even the small rejoice.
 Though threatened from purple rostra
 And dazed by the soldier's drum
 Proclaiming total defeat,
 The general loquacious Public
 (*There's a Way. There's a Voice.*)

Have been puzzled and struck dumb,
Hearing in every street
Singing and dancing.

Let even the young rejoice.
Lovers at their betrayal
Weeping alone in the night,
Have fallen asleep as they heard,
Though too far off to be certain
(*There's a Way. There's a Voice.*)
They had not imagined it,
Sounds that made grief absurd,
Singing and dancing.

Let even the old rejoice.
The Bleak and the Dim, abandoned
By impulse and regret,
Are startled out of their lives;
For to footsteps long expected
(*There's a Way. There's a Voice.*)
Their ruins echo, yet
The Demolisher arrives
Singing and dancing.

THE TEMPTATION OF ST. JOSEPH

I

JOSEPH

My shoes were shined, my pants were cleaned and pressed,
And I was hurrying to meet
My own true Love:

But a great crowd grew and grew
Till I could not push my way through,
Because
A star had fallen down the street;
When they saw who I was,
The police tried to do their best.

CHORUS [off]

*Joseph, you have heard
What Mary says occurred;
Yes, it may be so.
Is it likely? No.*

JOSEPH

The bar was gay, the lighting well-designed,
And I was sitting down to wait
My own true Love:
A voice I'd heard before, I think,
Cried: "This is on the House. I drink
To him
Who does not know it is too late";
When I asked for the time,
Everyone was very kind.

CHORUS [off]

*Mary may be pure,
But, Joseph, are you sure?
How is one to tell?
Suppose, for instance ... Well ...*

JOSEPH

Through cracks, up ladders, into waters deep,
I squeezed, I climbed, I swam to save
My own true Love:

Under a dead apple tree
 I saw an ass; when it saw me
 It brayed;
 A hermit sat in the mouth of a cave:
 When I asked him the way,
 He pretended to be asleep.

CHORUS [*off*]

*Maybe, maybe not.
 But, Joseph, you know what
 Your world, of course, will say
 About you anyway.*

JOSEPH

Where are you, Father, where?
 Caught in the jealous trap
 Of an empty house I hear
 As I sit alone in the dark
 Everything, everything,
 The drip of the bathroom tap,
 The creak of the sofa spring,
 The wind in the air-shaft, all
 Making the same remark
 Stupidly, stupidly,
 Over and over again.
 Father, what have I done?
 Answer me, Father, how
 Can I answer the tactless wall
 Or the pompous furniture now?
 Answer them ...

GABRIEL

No, you must.

JOSEPH

How then am I to know,
 Father, that you are just?
 Give me one reason.

GABRIEL

No.

JOSEPH

All I ask is one
 Important and elegant proof
 That what my Love had done
 Was really at your will
 And that your will is Love.

GABRIEL

No, you must believe;
 Be silent, and sit still.

II

NARRATOR

For the perpetual excuse
 Of Adam for his fall—"My little Eve,
 God bless her, did beguile me and I ate,"
 For his insistence on a nurse,
 All service, breast, and lap, for giving Fate
 Feminine gender to make girls believe
 That they can save him, you must now atone,
 Joseph, in silence and alone;
 While she who loves you makes you shake with fright,
 Your love for her must tuck you up and kiss good night.

For likening Love to war, for all
 The pay-off lines of limericks in which
 The weak resentful bar-fly shows his sting,
 For talking of their spiritual
 Beauty to chorus-girls, for flattering
 The features of old gorgons who are rich,
 For the impudent grin and Irish charm
 That hides a cold will to do harm,
 To-day the roles are altered; you must be
 The Weaker Sex whose passion is passivity.

For those delicious memories
 Cigars and sips of brandy can restore
 To old dried boys, for gallantry that scrawls
 In idolatrous detail and size
 A symbol of aggression on toilet walls,
 For having reasoned—"Woman is naturally pure
 Since she has no moustache," for having said,
 "No woman has a business head,"
 You must learn now that masculinity,
 To Nature, is a non-essential luxury.

Lest, finding it impossible
 To judge its object now or throatily
 Forgive it as eternal God forgives,
 Lust, tempted by this miracle
 To more ingenious evil, should contrive
 A heathen fetish from Virginity
 To soothe the spiritual petulance
 Of worn-out rakes and maiden aunts,
 Forgetting **nothing and believing** all,
 You must behave as if this were not strange at all.

Without a change in look or word,
 You both must act exactly as before;
 Joseph and Mary shall be man and wife
 Just as if nothing had occurred.
 There is one World of Nature and one Life;
 Sin fractures the Vision, not the Fact; for
 The Exceptional is always usual
 And the Usual exceptional.
 To choose what is difficult all one's days
 As if it were easy, that is faith. Joseph, praise.

III

SEMI-CHORUS

Joseph, Mary, pray for those
 Misled by moonlight and the rose,
 For all in our perplexity.
 Lovers who hear a distant bell
 That tolls from somewhere in their head
 Across the valley of their dream—
 "All those who love excessively
 Foot or thigh or arm or face
 Pursue a louche and fatuous fire
 And stumble into Hell"—
 Yet what can such foreboding seem
 But intellectual talk
 So long as bodies walk
 An earth where Time and Space
 Turn Heaven to a finite bed
 And Love into desire?
 Pray for us, enchanted with

The Green Bohemia of that myth
 Where knowledge of the flesh can take
 The guilt of being born away,
 Simultaneous passions make
 One eternal chastity:
 Pray for us romantics, pray.

BOYS' SEMI-CHORUS

Joseph, Mary, pray for us,
 Independent embryos who,
 Unconscious in another, do
 Evil as each creature does
 In every definite decision
 To improve; for even in
 The germ-cell's primary division
 Innocence is lost and sin,
 Already given as a fact,
 Once more issues as an act.

SEMI-CHORUS

Joseph, Mary, pray for all
 The proper and conventional
 Of whom this world approves.
 Pray for those whose married loves
 Acquire so readily
 The indolent fidelity
 Of unaired beds, for us to whom
 Domestic hatred can become
 A habit-forming drug, whose will
 To civil anarchy
 Uses disease to disobey
 And makes our private bodies ill.
 O pray for our salvation

Who take the prudent way,
 Believing we shall be exempted
 From the general condemnation
 Because our self-respect is tempted
 To incest not adultery:
 O pray for us, the bourgeoisie.

BOYS' SEMI-CHORUS

Joseph, Mary, pray
 For us children as in play
 Upon the nursery floor
 We gradually explore
 Our members till our jealous lives
 Have worked through to a clear
 But trivial idea
 Of that whence each derives
 A vague but massive feel
 Of being individual.
 O pray for our redemption; for
 The will that occupies
 Our sensual infancy
 Already is mature
 And could immediately
 Beget upon our flesh far more
 Expressions of its disbelief
 Than we shall manage to conceive
 In a long life of lies.

CHORUS

Blessed Woman,
 Excellent Man,
 Redeem for the dull the
 Average Way,

That common ungifted
Natures may
Believe that their normal
Vision can
Walk to perfection.

THE SUMMONS

I

STAR OF THE NATIVITY

I am that star most dreaded by the wise,
For they are drawn against their will to me,
Yet read in my procession through the skies
The doom of orthodox sophrosyne:
I shall discard their major preservation,
All that they know so long as no one asks;
I shall deprive them of their minor tasks
In free and legal households of sensation,
Of money, picnics, beer, and sanitation.

Beware. All those who follow me are led
Onto that Glassy Mountain where are no
Footholds for logic, to that Bridge of Dread
Where knowledge but increases vertigo:
Those who pursue me take a twisting lane
To find themselves immediately alone
With savage water or unfeeling stone,
In labyrinths where they must entertain
Confusion, cripples, tigers, thunder, pain.

THE FIRST WISE MAN

To break down Her defenses
And profit from the vision
That plain men can predict through an
Ascesis of their senses,
With rack and screw I put Nature through
A thorough inquisition:
But She was so afraid that if I were disappointed
I should hurt Her more that Her answers were disjointed—
I did. I didn't. I will. I won't.
She is just as big a liar, in fact, as we are.
To discover how to be truthful now
Is the reason I follow this star.

THE SECOND WISE MAN

My faith that in Time's constant
Flow lay real assurance
Broke down on this analysis—
At any given instant
All solids dissolve, no wheels revolve,
And facts have no endurance—
And who knows if it is by design or pure inadvertence
That the Present destroys its inherited self-importance?
With envy, terror, rage, regret,
We anticipate or remember but never are.
To discover how to be living now
Is the reason I follow this star.

THE THIRD WISE MAN

Observing how myopic
Is the Venus of the Soma,
The concept Ought would make, I thought,

Our passions philanthropic,
 And rectify in the sensual eye
 Both lens-flare and lens-coma:
 But arriving at the Greatest Good by introspection
 And counting the Greater Number, left no time for affection,
 Laughter, kisses, squeezing, smiles:
 And I learned why the learned are as despised as they are.
 To discover how to be loving now
 Is the reason I follow this star.

THE THREE WISE MEN

The weather has been awful,
 The countryside is dreary,
 Marsh, jungle, rock; and echoes mock,
 Calling our hope unlawful;
 But a silly song can help along
 Yours ever and sincerely:
 At least we know for certain that we are three old sinners,
 That this journey is much too long, that we want our dinners,
 And miss our wives, our books, our dogs,
 But have only the vaguest idea why we are what we are.
 To discover how to be human now
 Is the reason we follow this star.

STAR OF THE NATIVITY

Descend into the fosse of Tribulation,
 Take the cold hand of Terror for a guide;
 Below you in its swirling desolation
 Hear tortured Horror roaring for a bride:
 O do not falter at the last request
 But, as the huge deformed head rears to kill,
 Answer its craving with a clear I Will;

Then wake, a child in the rose-garden, pressed
 Happy and sobbing to your lover's breast.

II

NARRATOR

Now let the wife look up from her stove, the husband
 Interrupt his work, the child put down its toy,
 That His voice may be heard in our Just Society
 Who under the sunlight
 Of His calm, possessing the good earth, do well. Pray
 Silence for Caesar: stand motionless and hear
 In a concourse of body and concord of soul
 His proclamation.

RECITATIVE

CITIZENS OF THE EMPIRE, GREETING. ALL MALE PERSONS
 WHO SHALL HAVE ATTAINED THE AGE OF TWENTY-ONE
 YEARS OR OVER MUST PROCEED IMMEDIATELY TO THE
 VILLAGE, TOWNSHIP, CITY, PRECINCT OR OTHER LOCAL
 ADMINISTRATIVE AREA IN WHICH THEY WERE BORN AND
 THERE REGISTER THEMSELVES AND THEIR DEPENDANTS IF
 ANY WITH THE POLICE. WILFUL FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH
 THIS ORDER IS PUNISHABLE BY CONFISCATION OF GOODS
 AND LOSS OF CIVIL RIGHTS.

NARRATOR

You have been listening to the voice of Caesar
 Who overcame implacable Necessity
 By His endurance and by His skill has subdued the
 Welter of Fortune.

It is meet, therefore, that, before dispersing
 In pious equanimity to obey His orders,
 With well-tuned instruments and grateful voices
 We should praise Caesar.

III

FUGAL-CHORUS

Great is Caesar: He has conquered Seven Kingdoms.
 The First was the Kingdom of Abstract Idea:
 Last night it was Tom, Dick and Harry; to-night it is S's with P's;
 Instead of inflexions and accents
 There are prepositions and word-order;
 Instead of aboriginal objects excluding each other
 There are specimens reiterating a type;
 Instead of wood-nymphs and river-demons,
 There is one unconditioned ground of Being.
 Great is Caesar: God must be with Him.

Great is Caesar: He has conquered Seven Kingdoms.
 The Second was the Kingdom of Natural Cause:
 Last night it was Sixes and Sevens: to-night it is One and Two;
 Instead of saying, "Strange are the whims of the Strong,"
 We say, "Harsh is the Law but it is certain";
 Instead of building temples, we build laboratories;
 Instead of offering sacrifices, we perform experiments;
 Instead of reciting prayers, we note pointer-readings;
 Our lives are no longer erratic but efficient.
 Great is Caesar: God must be with Him.

Great is Caesar: He has conquered Seven Kingdoms.
 The Third was the Kingdom of Infinite Number:

Last night it was Rule-of-Thumb, to-night it is To-a-T;
 Instead of Quite-a-lot, there is Exactly-so-many;
 Instead of Only-a-few, there is Just-these;
 Instead of saying, "You must wait until I have counted,"
 We say, "Here you are. You will find this answer correct";
 Instead of nodding acquaintance with a few integers,
 The Transcendentals are our personal friends.
 Great is Caesar: God must be with Him.

Great is Caesar: He has conquered Seven Kingdoms.
 The Fourth was the Kingdom of Credit Exchange:
 Last night it was Tit-for-Tat, to-night it is C.O.D.;
 When we have a surplus, we need not meet someone with a deficit;
 When we have a deficit, we need not meet someone with a surplus;
 Instead of heavy treasures, there are paper symbols of value;
 Instead of Pay at Once, there is Pay when you can;
 Instead of My Neighbour, there is Our Customers;
 Instead of Country Fair, there is World Market.
 Great is Caesar: God must be with Him.

Great is Caesar: He has conquered Seven Kingdoms.
 The Fifth was the Kingdom of Inorganic Giants:
 Last night it was Heave-Ho, to-night it is Whee-Spree;
 When we want anything, They make it;
 When we dislike anything, They change it;
 When we want to go anywhere, They carry us;
 When the Barbarian invades us, They raise immovable shields;
 When we invade the Barbarian, They brandish irresistible swords;
 Fate is no longer a fiat of Matter, but a freedom of Mind.
 Great is Caesar: God must be with Him.

Great is Caesar: He has conquered Seven Kingdoms.
 The Sixth was the Kingdom of Organic Dwarfs:

Last night it was Ouch-Ouch, to-night it is Yum-Yum;
 When diseases waylay us, They strike them dead;
 When worries intrude on us, They throw them out;
 When pain accosts us, They save us from embarrassment;
 When we feel like sheep, They make us lions;
 When we feel like geldings, They make us stallions;
 Spirit is no longer under Flesh, but on top.
 Great is Caesar: God must be with Him.

Great is Caesar: He has conquered Seven Kingdoms.
 The Seventh was the Kingdom of Popular Soul:
 Last night it was Order-Order, to-night it is Hear-Hear;
 When he says, You are happy, we laugh;
 When he says, You are wretched, we cry;
 When he says, It is true, everyone believes it;
 When he says, It is false, no one believes it;
 When he says, This is good, this is loved;
 When he says, That is bad, that is hated.
 Great is Caesar: God must be with Him.

IV

NARRATOR

These are stirring times for the editors of newspapers:
 History is in the making; Mankind is on the march.
 The longest aqueduct in the world is already
 Under construction; the Committees on Fen-Drainage
 And Soil-Conservation will issue very shortly
 Their Joint Report; even the problems of Trade Cycles
 And Spiralling Prices are regarded by the experts
 As practically solved; and the recent restrictions
 Upon aliens and free-thinking Jews are beginning

To have a salutary effect upon public morale.
 True, the Western seas are still infested with pirates,
 And the rising power of the Barbarian in the North
 Is giving some cause for uneasiness; but we are fully
 Alive to these dangers; we are rapidly arming; and both
 Will be taken care of in due course: then, united
 In a sense of common advantage and common right,
 Our great Empire shall be secure for a thousand years.

If we were never alone or always too busy,
 Perhaps we might even believe what we know is not true:
 But no one is taken in, at least not all of the time;
 In our bath, or the subway, or the middle of the night,
 We know very well we are not unlucky but evil,
 That the dream of a Perfect State or No State at all,
 To which we fly for refuge, is a part of our punishment.

Let us therefore be contrite but without anxiety,
 For Powers and Times are not gods but mortal gifts from God;
 Let us acknowledge our defeats but without despair,
 For all societies and epochs are transient details,
 Transmitting an everlasting opportunity
 That the Kingdom of Heaven may come, not in our present
 And not in our future, but in the Fullness of Time.
 Let us pray.

V

CHORALE

Our Father, whose creative Will
 Asked Being for us all,
 Confirm it that Thy Primal Love
 May weave in us the freedom of

The actually deficient on
The justly actual.

Though written by Thy children with
A smudged and crooked line,
Thy Word is ever legible,
Thy Meaning unequivocal,
And for Thy Goodness even sin
Is valid as a sign.

Inflict Thy promises with each
Occasion of distress,
That from our incoherence we
May learn to put our trust in Thee,
And brutal fact persuade us to
Adventure, Art, and Peace.

THE VISION OF THE SHEPHERDS

I

THE FIRST SHEPHERD

The winter night requires our constant attention,
Watching that water and good-will,
Warmth and well-being, may still be there in the morning.

THE SECOND SHEPHERD

For behind the spontaneous joy of life
There is always a mechanism to keep going,

THE THIRD SHEPHERD

And someone like us is always there.

THE FIRST SHEPHERD

We observe that those who assure us their education
And money would do us such harm,
How real we are just as we are, and how they envy us,
For it is the centreless tree
And the uncivilised robin who are the truly happy,
Have done pretty well for themselves:

THE SECOND SHEPHERD

Nor can we help noticing how those who insist that
We ought to stand up for our rights,
And how important we are, keep insisting also
That it doesn't matter a bit
If one of us gets arrested or injured, for
It is only our numbers that count.

THE THIRD SHEPHERD

In a way they are right,

THE FIRST SHEPHERD

But to behave like a cogwheel
When one knows one is no such thing,

THE SECOND SHEPHERD

Merely to add to a crowd with one's passionate body,
Is not a virtue.

THE THIRD SHEPHERD

What is real
About us all is that each of us is waiting.

THE FIRST SHEPHERD

That is why we are able to bear

Ready-made clothes, second-hand art and opinions
And being washed and ordered about;

THE SECOND SHEPHERD

That is why you should not take our conversation
Too seriously, nor read too much
Into our songs;

THE THIRD SHEPHERD

Their purpose is mainly to keep us
From watching the clock all the time.

THE FIRST SHEPHERD

For, though we cannot say why, we know that something
Will happen:

THE SECOND SHEPHERD

What we cannot say,

THE THIRD SHEPHERD

Except that it will not be a reporter's item
Of unusual human interest;

THE FIRST SHEPHERD

That always means something unpleasant.

THE SECOND SHEPHERD

But one day or
The next we shall hear the Good News.

II

THE THREE SHEPHERDS

Levers nudge the aching wrist:
"You are free
Not to be,
Why exist?"
Wheels a thousand times a minute
Mutter, stutter,
"End the self you cannot mend,
Did you, friend, begin it?"
And the streets
Sniff at our defeats.
Then who is the Unknown
Who answers for our fear
As if it were His own,
So that we reply
Till the day we die:
"No, I don't know why,
But I'm glad I'm here"?

III

CHORUS OF ANGELS

Unto you a Child,
A Son is given.
Praising, proclaiming
The ingress of Love,
Earth's darkness invents
The blaze of Heaven,
And frigid silence

Meditates a song;
 For great joy has filled
 The narrow and the sad,
 While the emphasis
 Of the rough and big,
 The abiding crag
 And wandering wave,
 Is on forgiveness:
 Sing Glory to God
 And good-will to men,
 All, all, all of them.
 Run to Bethlehem.

SHEPHERDS

*Let us run to learn
 How to love and run;
 Let us run to Love.*

CHORUS

Now all things living,
 Domestic or wild,
 With whom you must share
 Light, water, and air,
 And suffer and shake
 In physical need,
 The sullen limpet,
 The exuberant weed,
 The mischievous cat,
 And the timid bird,
 Are glad for your sake
 As the new-born Word
 Declares that the old
 Authoritarian

Constraint is replaced
 By His Covenant,
 And a city based
 On love and consent
 Suggested to men,
 All, all, all of them.
 Run to Bethlehem.

SHEPHERDS

*Let us run to learn
 How to love and run;
 Let us run to Love.*

CHORUS

The primitive dead
 Progress in your blood,
 And generations
 Of the unborn, all
 Are leaping for joy
 In your reins to-day
 When the Many shall,
 Once in your common
 Certainty of this
 Child's loveableness,
 Resemble the One,
 That after to-day
 The children of men
 May be certain that
 The Father Abyss
 Is affectionate
 To all Its creatures,
 All, all, all of them.
 Run to Bethlehem.

AT THE MANGER

I

MARY

O shut your bright eyes that mine must endanger
 With their watchfulness; protected by its shade
 Escape from my care: what can you discover
 From my tender look but how to be afraid?
 Love can but confirm the more it would deny.
 Close your bright eye.

Sleep. What have you learned from the womb that bore you
 But an anxiety your Father cannot feel?
 Sleep. What will the flesh that I gave do for you,
 Or my mother love, but tempt you from His will?
 Why was I chosen to teach His Son to weep?
 Little One, sleep.

Dream. In human dreams earth ascends to Heaven
 Where no one need pray nor ever feel alone.
 In your first few hours of life here, O have you
 Chosen already what death must be your own?
 How soon will you start on the Sorrowful Way?
 Dream while you may.

II

FIRST WISE MAN

Led by the light of an unusual star,
 We hunted high and low.

SECOND WISE MAN

Have travelled far,
 For many days, a little group alone
 With doubts, reproaches, boredom, the unknown.

THIRD WISE MAN

Through stifling gorges.

FIRST WISE MAN

Over level lakes,

SECOND WISE MAN

Tundras intense and irresponsible seas.

THIRD WISE MAN

In vacant crowds and humming silences,

FIRST WISE MAN

By ruined arches and past modern shops,

SECOND WISE MAN

Counting the miles,

THIRD WISE MAN

And the absurd mistakes.

THE THREE WISE MEN

O here and now our endless journey stops.

FIRST SHEPHERD

We never left the place where we were born,

SECOND SHEPHERD

Have lived only one day, but every day,

THIRD SHEPHERD

Have walked a thousand miles yet only worn
The grass between our work and home away.

FIRST SHEPHERD

Lonely we were though never left alone.

SECOND SHEPHERD

The solitude familiar to the poor
Is feeling that the family next door,
The way it talks, eats, dresses, loves, and hates,
Is indistinguishable from one's own.

THIRD SHEPHERD

To-night for the first time the prison gates
Have opened.

FIRST SHEPHERD

Music and sudden light

SECOND SHEPHERD

Have interrupted the routine to-night,

THIRD SHEPHERD

And swept the filth of habit from our hearts.

THE THREE SHEPHERDS

O here and now our endless journey starts.

WISE MEN

Our arrogant longing to attain the tomb,

SHEPHERDS

Our sullen wish to go back to the womb,

WISE MEN

To have no past,

SHEPHERDS

No future,

TUTTI

Is refused.

And yet, without our knowledge, Love has used
Our weakness as a guard and guide.

We bless

WISE MEN

Our lives' impatience,

SHEPHERDS

Our lives' laziness,

TUTTI

And bless each other's sin, exchanging here

WISE MEN

Exceptional conceit

SHEPHERDS

With average fear.

TUTTI

Released by Love from isolating wrong,
 Let us for Love unite our various song,
 Each with his gift according to his kind
 Bringing this child his body and his mind.

III

WISE MEN

Child, at whose birth we would do obsequy
 For our tall errors of imagination,
 Redeem our talents with your little cry.

SHEPHERDS

Clinging like sheep to the earth for protection,
 We have not ventured far in any direction:
 Wean, Child, our ageing flesh away
 From its childish way.

WISE MEN

Love is more serious than Philosophy
 Who sees no humour in her observation
 That Truth is knowing that we know we lie.

SHEPHERDS

When, to escape what our memories are thinking,
 We go out at nights and stay up drinking,
 Stay then with our sick pride and mind
 The forgetful mind.

WISE MEN

Love does not will enraptured apathy;
 Fate plays the passive role of dumb temptation
 To wills where Love can doubt, affirm, deny.

SHEPHERDS

When, chafing at the rule of old offences,
 We run away to the sea of the senses,
 On strange beds then O welcome home
 Our horror of home.

WISE MEN

Love knows of no somatic tyranny;
 For homes are built for Love's accommodation
 By bodies from the void they occupy.

SHEPHERDS

When, exhausting our wills with our evil courses,
 We demand the good-will of cards and horses,
 Be then our lucky certainty
 Of uncertainty.

WISE MEN

Love does not fear substantial anarchy,
 But vividly expresses obligation
 With movement and in spontaneity.

SHEPHERDS

When, feeling the great boots of the rich on our faces,
 We live in the hope of one day changing places,
 Be then the truth of our abuse
 That we abuse.

WISE MEN

The singular is not Love's enemy;
 Love's possibilities of realisation
 Require an Otherness that can say *I*.

SHEPHERDS

When in dreams the beasts and cripples of resentment
 Rampage and revel to our hearts' contentment,
 Be then the poetry of hate
 That replaces hate.

WISE MEN

Not In but With our time Love's energy
 Exhibits Love's immediate operation;
 The choice to love is open till we die.

SHEPHERDS

O Living Love, by your birth we are able
 Not only, like the ox and ass of the stable,
 To love with our live wills, but love,
 Knowing we love.

TUTTI

O Living Love replacing phantasy,
 O Joy of life revealed in Love's creation;
 Our mood of longing turns to indication:
 Space is the Whom our loves are needed by,
 Time is our choice of How to love and Why.

THE MEDITATION OF SIMEON

SIMEON

As long as the apple had not been entirely digested, as long as there remained the least understanding between Adam and the stars, rivers and horses with whom he had once known complete intimacy, as long as Eve could share in any way with the moods of the rose or the ambitions of the swallow, there was still a hope that the effects of the poison would wear off, that the exile from Paradise was only a bad dream, that the Fall had not occurred in fact.

CHORUS

When we woke, it was day; we went on weeping.

SIMEON

As long as there were any roads to amnesia and anaesthesia still to be explored, any rare wine or curiosity of cuisine as yet untested, any erotic variation as yet unimagined or unrealised, any method of torture as yet undevised, any style of conspicuous waste as yet undiluted, any eccentricity of mania or disease as yet unrepresented, there was still a hope that man had not been poisoned but transformed, that Paradise was not an eternal state from which he had been forever expelled, but a childish state which he had permanently outgrown, that the Fall had occurred by necessity.

CHORUS

We danced in the dark, but were not deceived.

SIMEON

As long as there were any experiments still to be undertaken in restoring that order in which desire had once rejoiced to be reflected, any code of equity and obligation upon which some society had not yet been founded, any species of property of which the value had not

yet been appreciated, any talent that had not yet won private devotion and public honour, any rational concept of the Good or intuitive feeling for the Holy that had not yet found its precise and beautiful expression, any technique of contemplation or ritual of sacrifice and praise that had not yet been properly conducted, any faculty of mind or body that had not yet been thoroughly disciplined, there was still a hope that some antidote might be found, that the gates of Paradise had indeed slammed to, but with the exercise of a little patience and ingenuity could be unlocked, that the Fall had occurred by accident.

CHORUS

Lions came loping into the lighted city.

SIMEON

Before the Positive could manifest Itself specifically, it was necessary that nothing should be left that negation could remove; the emancipation of Time from Space had first to be complete, the Revolution of the Images, in which the memories rose up and cast into subjection the senses by Whom hitherto they had been enslaved, successful beyond their wildest dreams, the mirror in which the Soul expected to admire herself so perfectly polished that her natural consolation of vagueness should be utterly withdrawn.

CHORUS

We looked at our Shadow, and, Lo, it was lame.

SIMEON

Before the Infinite could manifest Itself in the finite, it was necessary that man should first have reached that point along his road to Knowledge where, just as it rises from the swamps of Confusion onto the sunny slopes of Objectivity, it forks in opposite directions towards the One and the Many; where, therefore, in order to proceed at all, he must decide which is Real and which only Appearance, yet at the

same time cannot escape the knowledge that his choice is arbitrary and subjective.

CHORUS

Promising to meet, we parted forever.

SIMEON

Before the Unconditional could manifest Itself under the conditions of existence, it was necessary that man should first have reached the ultimate frontier of consciousness, the secular limit of memory beyond which there remained but one thing for him to know, his Original Sin, but of this it is impossible for him to become conscious because it is itself what conditions his will to knowledge. For as long as he was in Paradise he could not sin by any conscious intention or act: his as yet unfallen will could only rebel against the truth by taking flight into an unconscious lie; he could only eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil by forgetting that its existence was a fiction of the Evil One, that there is only the Tree of Life.

CHORUS

The bravest drew back on the brink of the Abyss.

SIMEON

From the beginning until now God spoke through his prophets. The Word aroused the uncomprehending depths of their flesh to a witnessing fury, and their witness was this: that the Word should be made Flesh. Yet their witness could only be received as long as it was vaguely misunderstood, as long as it seemed either to be neither impossible nor necessary, or necessary but not impossible, or impossible but not necessary; and the prophecy could not therefore be fulfilled. For it could only be fulfilled when it was no longer possible to receive, because it was clearly understood as absurd. The Word could not be made Flesh until men had reached a state of absolute contradiction

between clarity and despair in which they would have no choice but either to accept absolutely or to reject absolutely, yet in their choice there should be no element of luck, for they would be fully conscious of what they were accepting or rejecting.

CHORUS

The eternal spaces were congested and depraved.

SIMEON

But here and now the Word which is implicit in the Beginning and in the End is become immediately explicit, and that which hitherto we could only passively fear as the incomprehensible I AM, henceforth we may actively love with comprehension that THOU ART. Wherefore, having seen Him, not in some prophetic vision of what might be, but with the eyes of our own weakness as to what actually is, we are bold to say that we have seen our salvation.

CHORUS

Now and forever, we are not alone.

SIMEON

By the event of this birth the true significance of all other events is defined, for of every other occasion it can be said that it could have been different, but of this birth it is the case that it could in no way be other than it is. And by the existence of this Child, the proper value of all other existences is given, for of every other creature it can be said that it has extrinsic importance but of this Child it is the case that He is in no sense a symbol.

CHORUS

We have right to believe that we really exist.

SIMEON

By Him is dispelled the darkness wherein the fallen will cannot distinguish between temptation and sin, for in Him we become fully conscious of Necessity as our freedom to be tempted, and of Freedom as our necessity to have faith. And by Him is illuminated the time in which we execute those choices through which our freedom is realized or prevented, for the course of History is predictable in the degree to which all men love themselves, and spontaneous in the degree to which each man loves God and through Him his neighbour.

CHORUS

The distresses of choice are our chance to be blessed.

SIMEON

Because in Him the Flesh is united to the Word without magical transformation, Imagination is redeemed from promiscuous fornication with her own images. The tragic conflict of Virtue with Necessity is no longer confined to the Exceptional Hero; for disaster is not the impact of a curse upon a few great families, but issues continually from the hubris of every tainted will. Every invalid is Roland defending the narrow pass against hopeless odds, every stenographer Brünnhilde refusing to renounce her lover's ring which came into existence through the renunciation of love.

Nor is the Ridiculous a species any longer of the Ugly; for since of themselves all men are without merit, all are ironically assisted to their comic bewilderment by the Grace of God. Every Cabinet Minister is the woodcutter's simple-minded son to whom the fishes and the crows are always whispering the whereabouts of the Dancing Water or the Singing Branch, every heiress the washerwoman's butter-fingered daughter on whose pillow the fairy keeps laying the herb that could cure the Prince's mysterious illness.

Nor is there any situation which is essentially more or less interesting than another. Every tea-table is a battlefield littered with old catastrophes and haunted by the vague ghosts of vast issues, every martyrdom an occasion for flip cracks and sententious oratory.

Because in Him all passions find a logical In-Order-That, by Him is the perpetual recurrence of Art assured.

CHORUS

Safe in His silence, our songs are at play.

SIMEON

Because in Him the Word is united to the Flesh without loss of perfection, Reason is redeemed from incestuous fixation on her own Logic, for the One and the Many are simultaneously revealed as real. So that we may no longer, with the Barbarians, deny the Unity, asserting that there are as many gods as there are creatures, nor, with the philosophers, deny the Multiplicity, asserting that God is One who has no need of friends and is indifferent to a World of Time and Quantity and Horror which He did not create, nor, with Israel, may we limit the co-inherence of the One and the Many to a special case, asserting that God is only concerned with and of concern to that People whom out of all that He created He has chosen for His own.

For the Truth is indeed One, without which is no salvation, but the possibilities of real knowledge are as many as are the creatures in the very real and most exciting universe that God creates with and for His love, and it is not Nature which is one public illusion, but we who have each our many private illusions about Nature.

Because in Him abstraction finds a passionate For-The-Sake-Of, by Him is the continuous development of Science assured.

CHORUS

Our lost Appearances are saved by His love.

SIMEON

And because of His visitation, we may no longer desire God as if He were lacking: our redemption is no longer a question of pursuit but of surrender to Him who is always and everywhere present. Therefore at every moment we pray that, following Him, we may depart from our anxiety into His peace.

CHORUS

Its errors forgiven, may our Vision come home.

THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

I

HEROD

Because I am bewildered, because I must decide, because my decision must be in conformity with Nature and Necessity, let me honour those through whom my nature is by necessity what it is.

To Fortune—that I have become Tetrarch, that I have escaped assassination, that at sixty my head is clear and my digestion sound.

To my Father—for the means to gratify my love of travel and study.

To my Mother—for a straight nose.

To Eva, my coloured nurse—for regular habits.

To my brother, Sandy, who married a trapeze artist and died of drink—for so refuting the position of the Hedonists.

To Mr. Stewart, nicknamed The Carp, who instructed me in the elements of geometry through which I came to perceive the errors of the tragic poets.

To Professor Lighthouse—for his lectures on The Peloponnesian War.

To the stranger on the boat to Sicily—for recommending to me Brown on Resolution.

To my secretary, Miss Button—for admitting that my speeches were inaudible.

There is no visible disorder. No crime—what could be more innocent than the birth of an artisan's child? To-day has been one of those perfect winter days, cold, brilliant, and utterly still, when the bark of the shepherd's dog carries for miles, and the great wild mountains come up quite close to the city walls, and the mind feels intensely awake, and this evening as I stand at this window high up in the citadel there is nothing in the whole magnificent panorama of plain and mountains to indicate that the Empire is threatened by a danger more dreadful than any invasion of Tartars on racing camels or conspiracy of the Praetorian Guard.

Barges are unloading soil fertiliser at the river wharves. Soft drinks and sandwiches may be had in the inns at reasonable prices. Allotment gardening has become popular. The highway to the coast goes straight up over the mountains and the truck-drivers no longer carry guns. Things are beginning to take shape. It is a long time since anyone stole the park benches or murdered the swans. There are children in this province who have never seen a louse, shopkeepers who have never handled a counterfeit coin, women of forty who have never hidden in a ditch except for fun. Yes, in twenty years I have managed to do a little. Not enough, of course. There are villages only a few miles from here where they still believe in witches. There isn't a single town where a good bookshop would pay. One could count on the fingers of one hand the people capable of solving the problem of Achilles and the Tortoise. Still it is a beginning. In twenty years the darkness has been pushed back a few inches. And what, after all, is the whole Empire, with its few thousand square miles on which it is possible to lead the Rational Life, but a tiny patch of light compared with

those immense areas of barbaric night that surround it on all sides, that incoherent wilderness of rage and terror, where Mongolian idiots are regarded as sacred and mothers who give birth to twins are instantly put to death, where malaria is treated by yelling, where warriors of superb courage obey the commands of hysterical female impersonators, where the best cuts of meat are reserved for the dead, where, if a white blackbird has been seen, no more work may be done that day, where it is firmly believed that the world was created by a giant with three heads or that the motions of the stars are controlled from the liver of a rogue elephant?

Yet even inside this little civilized patch itself, where, at the cost of heaven knows how much grief and bloodshed, it has been made unnecessary for anyone over the age of twelve to believe in fairies or that First Causes reside in mortal and finite objects, so many are still homesick for that disorder wherein every passion formerly enjoyed a frantic license. Caesar flies to his hunting lodge pursued by ennui; in the faubourgs of the Capital, Society grows savage, corrupted by silks and scents, softened by sugar and hot water, made insolent by theatres and attractive slaves; and everywhere, including this province, new prophets spring up every day to sound the old barbaric note.

I have tried everything. I have prohibited the sale of crystals and ouija-boards; I have slapped a heavy tax on playing cards; the courts are empowered to sentence alchemists to hard labour in the mines; it is a statutory offense to turn tables or feel bumps. But nothing is really effective. How can I expect the masses to be sensible when, for instance, to my certain knowledge, the captain of my own guard wears an amulet against the Evil Eye, and the richest merchant in the city consults a medium over every important transaction?

Legislation is helpless against the wild prayer of longing that rises, day in, day out, from all these households under my protection: "O God, put away justice and truth for we cannot understand them and do not want them. Eternity would bore us dreadfully. Leave Thy heav-

ens and come down to our earth of waterclocks and hedges. Become our uncle. Look after Baby, amuse Grandfather, escort Madam to the Opera, help Willy with his home-work, introduce Muriel to a handsome naval officer. Be interesting and weak like us, and we will love you as we love ourselves."

Reason is helpless, and now even the Poetic Compromise no longer works, all those lovely fairy tales in which Zeus, disguising himself as a swan or a bull or a shower of rain or what-have-you, lay with some beautiful woman and begot a hero. For the Public has grown too sophisticated. Under all the charming metaphors and symbols, it detects the stern command, "Be and act heroically"; behind the myth of divine origin, it senses the real human excellence that is a reproach to its own baseness. So, with a bellow of rage, it kicks Poetry downstairs and sends for Prophecy. "Your sister has just insulted me. I asked for a God who should be as like me as possible. What use to me is a God whose divinity consists in doing difficult things that I cannot do or saying clever things that I cannot understand? The God I want and intend to get must be someone I can recognise immediately without having to wait and see what he says or does. There must be nothing in the least extraordinary about him. Produce him at once, please. I'm sick of waiting."

To-day, apparently, judging by the trio who came to see me this morning with an ecstatic grin on their scholarly faces, the job has been done. "God has been born," they cried, "we have seen him ourselves. The World is saved. Nothing else matters."

One needn't be much of a psychologist to realise that if this rumour is not stamped out now, in a few years it is capable of diseasing the whole Empire, and one doesn't have to be a prophet to predict the consequences if it should.

Reason will be replaced by Revelation. Instead of Rational Law, objective truths perceptible to any who will undergo the necessary intellectual discipline, and the same for all, Knowledge will degenerate

into a riot of subjective visions—feelings in the solar plexus induced by undernourishment, angelic images generated by fevers or drugs, dream warnings inspired by the sound of falling water. Whole cosmogonies will be created out of some forgotten personal resentment, complete epics written in private languages, the daubs of school children ranked above the greatest masterpieces.

Idealism will be replaced by Materialism. Priapus will only have to move to a good address and call himself Eros to become the darling of middle-aged women. Life after death will be an eternal dinner party where all the guests are twenty years old. Diverted from its normal and wholesome outlet in patriotism and civic or family pride, the need of the materialistic Masses for some visible Idol to worship will be driven into totally unsocial channels where no education can reach it. Divine honours will be paid to silver tea-pots, shallow depressions in the earth, names on maps, domestic pets, ruined windmills, even in extreme cases, which will become increasingly common, to headaches, or malignant tumors, or four o'clock in the afternoon.

Justice will be replaced by Pity as the cardinal human virtue, and all fear of retribution will vanish. Every corner-boy will congratulate himself: "I'm such a sinner that God had to come down in person to save me. I must be a devil of a fellow." Every crook will argue: "I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really the world is admirably arranged." And the ambition of every young cop will be to secure a death-bed repentance. The New Aristocracy will consist exclusively of hermits, bums, and permanent invalids. The Rough Diamond, the Consumptive Whore, the bandit who is good to his mother, the epileptic girl who has a way with animals will be the heroes and heroines of the New Tragedy when the general, the statesman, and the philosopher have become the butt of every farce and satire.

Naturally this cannot be allowed to happen. Civilisation must be saved even if this means sending for the military, as I suppose it does. How dreary. Why is it that in the end civilisation always has to call in

these professional tidiers to whom it is all one whether it be Pythagoras or a homicidal lunatic that they are instructed to exterminate. O dear, Why couldn't this wretched infant be born somewhere else? Why can't people be sensible? I don't want to be horrid. Why can't they see that the notion of a finite God is absurd? Because it is. And suppose, just for the sake of argument, that it isn't, that this story is true, that this child is in some inexplicable manner both God and Man, that he grows up, lives, and dies, without committing a single sin? Would that make life any better? On the contrary it would make it far, far worse. For it can only mean this: that once having shown them how, God would expect every man, whatever his fortune, to lead a sinless life in the flesh and on earth. Then indeed would the human race be plunged into madness and despair. And for me personally at this moment it would mean that God had given me the power to destroy Himself. I refuse to be taken in. He could not play such a horrible practical joke. Why should He dislike me so? I've worked like a slave. Ask anyone you like. I read all official dispatches without skipping. I've taken elocution lessons. I've hardly ever taken bribes. How dare He allow me to decide? I've tried to be good. I brush my teeth every night. I haven't had sex for a month. I object. I'm a liberal. I want everyone to be happy. I wish I had never been born.

II

SOLDIERS

When the Sex War ended with the slaughter of the Grandmothers,
They found a bachelor's baby suffocating under them;
Somebody called him George and that was the end of it:

They hitched him up to the Army.

George, you old debutante,

How did you get in the Army?

In the Retreat from Reason he deserted on his rocking-horse
And lived on a fairy's kindness till he tired of kicking her;
He smashed her spectacles and stole her

cheque-book and mackintosh

Then cruised his way back to the Army.

George, you old numero,

How did you get in the Army?

Before the Diet of Sugar he was using razor-blades
And exited soon after with an allergy to maidenheads;
He discovered a cure of his own, but no one would patent it,

So he showed up again in the Army.

George, you old flybynight,

How did you get in the Army?

When the Vice Crusades were over he was hired by some Muscovites
Prospecting for deodorants among the Eskimos;
He was caught by a common cold and

condemned to the whiskey mines,

But schemozzled back to the Army.

George, you old Emperor,

How did you get in the Army?

Since Peace was signed with Honour he's been minding his business;
But, whoops, here comes His Idleness, buttoning his uniform;
Just in tidy time to massacre the Innocents;

He's come home to roost in the Army.

George, you old matador,

Welcome back to the Army.

III

RACHEL

On the Left are grinning dogs, peering down into a solitude
too deep to fill with roses.
On the Right are sensible sheep, gazing up at a pride where
no dream can grow.
Somewhere in these unending wastes of delirium is a lost child,
speaking of Long Ago in the language of wounds.
To-morrow, perhaps, he will come to himself in Heaven.
But here Grief turns her silence, neither in this direction, nor
in that, nor for any reason.
And her coldness now is on the earth forever.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

I

JOSEPH

Mirror, let us through the glass
No authority can pass.

MARY

Echo, if the strong should come,
Tell a white lie or be dumb.

VOICES OF THE DESERT

It was visitors' day at the vinegar works
In Tenderloin Town when I tore my time;
A sorrowful snapshot was my sinful wage:
Was that why you left me, elusive bones?

*Come to our bracing desert
Where eternity is eventful,
For the weather-glass
Is set at Alas,
The thermometer at Resentful.*

MARY

The Kingdom of the Robbers lies
Between Time and our memories;

JOSEPH

Fugitives from Space must cross
The waste of the Anonymous.

VOICES OF THE DESERT

How should he figure my fear of the dark?
The moment he can he'll remember me,
The silly he locked in the cellar for fun,
And his dear little doggie shall die in his arms.

*Come to our old-world desert
Where everyone goes to pieces;
You can pick up tears
For souvenirs
Or genuine diseases.*

JOSEPH

Geysers and volcanoes give
Sudden comical relief;

MARY_____

And the vulture is a boon
On a dull hot afternoon.

VOICES OF THE DESERT

All Father's nightingales knew their place,
 The gardens were loyal: look at them now.
 The roads are so careless, the rivers so rude,
 My studs have been stolen; I must speak to the sea.

*Come to our well-run desert
 Where anguish arrives by cable,
 And the deadly sins
 May be bought by tins
 With instructions on the label.*

MARY

Skulls recurring every mile
 Direct the thirsty to the Nile;

JOSEPH

And the jackal's eye at night
 Forces Error to keep right.

VOICES OF THE DESERT

In the land of lilies I lost my wits,
 Nude as a number all night I ran
 With a ghost for a guest along green canals;
 By the waters of waking I wept for the weeds.

*Come to our jolly desert
 Where even the dolls go whoring;
 Where cigarette-ends
 Become intimate friends,
 And it's always three in the morning.*

JOSEPH AND MARY

Safe in Egypt we shall sigh
 For lost insecurity;

Only when her terrors come
 Does our flesh feel quite at home.

II

RECITATIVE

Fly, Holy Family, from our immediate rage,
 That our future may be freed from our past; retrace
 The footsteps of law-giving
 Moses, back through the sterile waste,

Down to the rotten kingdom of Egypt, the damp
 Tired delta where in her season of glory our
 Forefathers sighed in bondage;
 Abscond with the Child to the place

That their children dare not revisit, to the time
 They do not care to remember; hide from our pride
 In our humiliation;
 Fly from our death with our new life.

III

NARRATOR

Well, so that is that. Now we must dismantle the tree,
 Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes—
 Some have got broken—and carrying them up to the attic.
 The holly and the mistletoe must be taken down and burnt,
 And the children got ready for school. There are enough
 Left-overs to do, warmed-up, for the rest of the week—
 Not that we have much appetite, having drunk such a lot,

Stayed up so late, attempted—quite unsuccessfully—
 To love all of our relatives, and in general
 Grossly overestimated our powers. Once again
 As in previous years we have seen the actual Vision and failed
 To do more than entertain it as an agreeable
 Possibility, once again we have sent Him away,
 Begging though to remain His disobedient servant,
 The promising child who cannot keep His word for long.
 The Christmas Feast is already a fading memory,
 And already the mind begins to be vaguely aware
 Of an unpleasant whiff of apprehension at the thought
 Of Lent and Good Friday which cannot, after all, now
 Be very far off. But, for the time being, here we all are,
 Back in the moderate Aristotelian city
 Of darning and the Eight-Fifteen, where Euclid's geometry
 And Newton's mechanics would account for our experience,
 And the kitchen table exists because I scrub it.
 It seems to have shrunk during the holidays. The streets
 Are much narrower than we remembered; we had forgotten
 The office was as depressing as this. To those who have seen
 The Child, however dimly, however incredulously,
 The Time Being is, in a sense, the most trying time of all.
 For the innocent children who whispered so excitedly
 Outside the locked door where they knew the presents to be
 Grew up when it opened. Now, recollecting that moment
 We can repress the joy, but the guilt remains conscious;
 Remembering the stable where for once in our lives
 Everything became a You and nothing was an It.
 And craving the sensation but ignoring the cause,
 We look round for something, no matter what, to inhibit
 Our self-reflection, and the obvious thing for that purpose
 Would be some great suffering. So, once we have met the Son,
 We are tempted ever after to pray to the Father:

"Lead us into temptation and evil for our sake."
 They will come, all right, don't worry; probably in a form
 That we do not expect, and certainly with a force
 More dreadful than we can imagine. In the meantime
 There are bills to be paid, machines to keep in repair,
 Irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem
 From insignificance. The happy morning is over,
 The night of agony still to come; the time is noon:
 When the Spirit must practise his scales of rejoicing
 Without even a hostile audience, and the Soul endure
 A silence that is neither for nor against her faith
 That God's Will be done, that, in spite of her prayers,
 God will cheat no one, not even the world of its triumph.

IV

CHORUS

He is the Way.
 Follow Him through the land of Unlikeness;
 You will see rare beasts, and have unique adventures.

He is the Truth.
 Seek Him in the Kingdom of Anxiety;
 You will come to a great city that has expected your return for years.

He is the Life.
 Love Him in the World of the Flesh;
 And at your marriage all its occasions shall dance for joy.