



THE QUEEN OF  
SEVEN SWORDS

*By* G. K. CHESTERTON

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# THE QUEEN OF SEVEN SWORDS

BY

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**IN MEMORIAM**

J.S.P.

You go before me on all roads  
On bridges broad enough to spread  
Between the learned and the dunce  
Between the living and the dead

**THE WHITE WITCH**

The dark Diana of the groves  
Whose name is Hecate in hell  
Heaves up her awful horns to heaven  
White with the light I know too well.

The moon that broods upon her brows  
Mirrors the monstrous hollow lands  
In leprous silver; at the term  
Of triple twisted roads she stands.

Dreams are no sin or only sin  
For them that waking dream they dream;  
But I have learned what wiser knights  
Follow the Grail and not the Gleam.

I found One hidden in every home,  
A voice that sings about the house,  
A nurse that scares the nightmares off,  
A mother nearer than a spouse,

Whose picture once I saw; and there  
Wild as of old and weird and sweet,  
In sevenfold splendour blazed the moon  
Not on her brow; beneath her feet.

## **THE RETURN OF EVE**

When Man rose up out of the red mountains  
Of which Man was made  
A giant ribbed out of the red mountains  
Reared and displayed.  
Of him was not posterity nor parent  
Future or past  
But the sun beheld him for a beauteous monster  
The first and last.

When God arose upon the red mountains  
Man had fallen prone

Flat and flung wide like a continent, capes and  
headlands,

The vast limbs thrown.

And the Lord lamented over Man, saying "Never  
Shall there be but one

For no man born shall be mighty as he was mighty  
To amaze the sun.

"Not till I put upon me the red armour

That was man's clay

And walk the world with the mask of man for a vizor  
Not till that day.

For on God alone shall the image of God be graven  
Which Adam wore

Seeing I alone can lift up this load of ruin  
To walk once more."

But the Lord looked down on the beauty of Woman  
shattered,

A fallen sky,

Crying "O crown and wonder and world's desire  
Shall this too die?

Lo, it repenteth me that this too is taken;

I will repay,

I will repair and repeat of the ancient pattern  
Even in this clay

"And this alone out of all things fallen and formless

I will form anew

And this red lily of all the uprooted garden

Plant where it grew

That the dear dead thing that was all and only a woman



Without stain or scar  
Rise, fallen no more with Lucifer Son of Morning,  
The Morning Star."

The cloud came down upon the red mountains  
Long since untrod  
Red quarries of incredible creation  
Red mines of God  
And a dwarfed and dwindled race in the dark red  
deserts  
Stumbled and strayed  
While one in the mortal shape that was once for  
immortals  
Made, was remade.

Till a face looked forth from a window in one white  
daybreak  
Small streets above  
As the face of the first love of our first father,  
The world's first love.  
And men looked up at the woman made for the  
morning  
When the stars were young,  
For whom, more rude than a beggar's rhyme in the  
gutter,  
These songs are sung.

**A PARTY QUESTION**

*"You hear a great deal about His Mother, for Our Lady has become the patron of a party, whereas Christ was never a party leader."—MR. ARNOLD LUNN, on "Roman Converts."*

The golden roses of the glorious mysteries  
Grew wild as cowslips on the common land:  
Hers, who was more humanity's than history's,  
Until you banned them as a badge is banned.

The silver roses of the sorrow of Mary,  
And the red roses of her royal mirth,  
Were free; till you, turned petulant and wary,  
Went weeding wild-flowers from your mother-earth.

Mother of Man; the Mother of the Maker;  
Silently speaking as the flowering trees,  
What made of her a striker and a breaker  
Who spoke no scorn even of men like these?

She named no hypocrites a viper race,  
She nailed no tyrant for a vulpine cur,  
She flogged no hucksters from the holy place;  
Why was your new wise world in dread of her?

Whom had she greeted and not graced in greeting,  
Whom did she touch and touch not to his peace;  
And what are you, that made of such a meeting  
Quarrels and quibbles and a taunt to tease?

Who made that inn a fortress? What strange blindness  
Beat on the open door of that great heart,

Stood on its guard against unguarded kindness  
And made the sun a secret set apart?

By this we measure you, upon your showing  
So many shields to her who bore no sword,  
All your unnatural nature and the flowing  
Of sundering rivers now so hard to ford.

We know God's priests had drunken iniquity,  
Through our sins too did such offences come,  
Mad Martin's bell, the mouth of anarchy,  
Knox and the horror of that hollow drum.

We know the tale; half truth and double treason,  
Borgia and Torquemada in the throng,  
Bad men who had no right to their right reason,  
Good men who had good reason to be wrong.

But when that tangled war our fathers waged  
Stirred against her—then could we hear right well,  
Through roar of men not wrongfully enraged,  
The little hiss that only comes from hell.

## A LITTLE LITANY

When God turned back eternity and was young,  
Ancient of Days, grown little for your mirth  
(As under the low arch the land is bright)

Peered through you, gate of heaven—and saw the earth.

Or shutting out his shining skies awhile  
Built you about him for a house of gold  
To see in pictured walls his storied world  
Return upon him as a tale is told.

Or found his mirror there; the only glass  
That would not break with that unbearable light  
Till in a corner of the high dark house  
God looked on God, as ghosts meet in the night.

Star of his morning; that unfallen star  
In the strange starry overturn of space  
When earth and sky changed places for an hour  
And heaven looked upwards in a human face.

Or young on your strong knees and lifted up  
Wisdom cried out, whose voice is in the street,  
And more than twilight of twiformed cherubim  
Made of his throne indeed a mercy-seat.

Or risen from play at your pale raiment's hem  
God, grown adventurous from all time's repose,  
Of your tall body climbed the ivory tower  
And kissed upon your mouth the mystic rose.

# THE BALLAD OF KING ARTHUR

King Arthur on Mount Badon  
Bore the Virgin on his back  
When Britain trod the Roman way  
And the red gods went back.  
Back to their desolate lands of dawn  
And peace to westward lay  
About the crowned and carven thing  
He carried all the day.

The light on Badon battle  
Was dark with driving darts  
And dark with rocking catapults  
Reared yet of Roman arts  
And dark with Raven banners riven  
But not too dark to see  
What shape it was above the shields  
In the sunburst of victory.

King Arthur on Mount Badon  
Bore Our Lady on his shield  
High on that human altar held  
Above the howling field,  
High on that living altar heaved  
As a giant heaves a tower  
She saw all heathenry appalled  
And the turning of the hour.

The sun on Badon battle  
In sanguine seas went down  
And night had hid the Roman wall

That hid the Christian town  
And dim it hung on camp and dyke  
But not too dim to show  
What statue stood against the stars  
On Badon long ago.

Great tales are told of dead men gone  
And all men live by tales  
And glory be to the endless tale  
Whose old news never fails.  
Arthur is lost in Lyonesse  
Kings sought his grave in vain  
And old men quote and question still  
If Arthur comes again.

The crawling dragon climbed his crest  
The heralds paint his shield,  
The fairies stole the Roman sword  
Rusted on Badon field.  
They mixed his name with dames of France  
And witches out of Wales:  
Great tales are told of dead men gone,  
And dead men tell no tales.

The Queens that bore King Arthur's bier  
In many a pageant pass;  
Strange ladies walking by still lakes  
Like shadows in a glass:  
And well it were that on the world  
Such splendid shadows shone  
Though round his throne a thousand queens  
Praised him like Solomon.

The Queen that wronged King Arthur's house  
Had lovers in all lands  
And many a poet praised her pride  
At many a queen's commands:  
And the King shrank to a shadow  
Watching behind a screen  
And the Queen walked with Lancelot  
And the world walked with the Queen

The presses throbbed, the books piled high,  
The chant grew rich and strong:  
The Virgin Queen the courtiers knew  
Had much esteem for song.  
The Faerie Queen the poets praised  
Heard every fairy tale...  
But many a song were broken short  
And many a voice would fail—

Stillness like lightning strike the street  
And doubt and deep amaze  
And many a courtly bard be dumb  
Beside his butt and bays  
And many a patron prince turned pale—  
If one such flash made plain  
The Queen that stands at his right hand  
If Arthur comes again.

**REGINA ANGELORUM**

Our Lady went into a strange country,  
Our Lady, for she was ours  
And had run on the little hills behind the houses  
And pulled small flowers;  
But she rose up and went into a strange country  
With strange thrones and powers.

And there were giants in the land she walked in,  
Tall as their toppling towns,  
With heads so high in heaven, the constellations  
Served them for crowns;  
And their feet might have forded like a brook the  
abysses  
Where Babel drowns

They were girt about with the wings of the morning  
and evening  
Furled and unfurled,  
Round the speckled sky where our small spinning  
planet  
Like a top is twirled;  
And the swords they waved were the unending comets  
That shall end the world.

And moving in innocence and in accident,  
She turned the face  
That none has ever looked on without loving  
On the Lords of Space;  
And one hailed her with her name in our own country  
That is full of grace.



Our Lady went into a strange country  
    And they crowned her for a queen,  
For she needed never to be stayed or questioned  
    But only seen;  
And they were broken down under unbearable beauty  
    As we have been.

But ever she walked till away in the last high places  
    One great light shone  
From the pillared throne of the king of all that country  
    Who sat thereon;  
And she cried aloud as she cried under the gibbet  
    For she saw her son.

Our Lady wears a crown in a strange country,  
    The crown he gave,  
But she has not forgotten to call to her old  
companions,  
    To call and crave;  
And to hear her calling a man might arise and thunder  
    On the doors of the grave

## THE PARADOX

These wells that shine and seem as shallow as pools,  
These tales that, being too plain for the fool's eyes,  
Incredibly clear are clearly incredible—  
Truths by their depth deceiving more than lies.

When did the ninety and nine just men perceive  
A far faint mockery in their title's sense  
In the strange safety of their flocks and herds  
And all the impenitence of innocence?

The sons of reason sin not and throw stones,  
Nor guess where burn behind the battered door,  
In the shining irony of Candlemas,  
A hundred flames to purify the pure.

## THE TOWERS OF TIME

Under what withering leprous light  
The very grass as hair is grey,  
Grass in the cracks of the paven courts  
Of gods we graved but yesterday.  
Senate, republic, empire, all  
We leaned our backs on like a wall  
And blessed as strong and blamed as stolid—  
Can it be these that waver and fall?

And what is this like a ghost returning,  
A dream grown strong in the strong daylight?  
The all-forsaken, the unforgotten,  
The ever-behind and out of sight.  
We turned our backs and our blind flesh felt it  
Growing and growing, a tower in height.

Ah, not alone the evil splendour  
And not the insolent arms alone  
Break with the ramrod, stiff and brittle,  
The sceptre of the nordic throne;  
But things of manlier renown  
Reel in the wreck of throne and crown,  
With tyrannous tyranny, tyrannous loyalty,  
Tyrannous liberty, all gone down.

(There is never a crack in the ivory tower  
Or a hinge to groan in the house of gold  
Or a leaf of the rose in the wind to wither  
And She grows young as the world grows old.  
A Woman clothed with the sun returning  
To clothe the sun when the sun is cold.)

Ah, who had guessed that in a moment  
Great Liberty that loosed the tribes,  
The Republic of the young men's battles  
Grew stale and stank of old men's bribes,  
And where we watched her smile in power  
A statue like a starry tower  
The stone face sneers as in a nightmare  
Down on a world that worms devour

(Archaic incredible dead dawns breaking  
Deep in the deserts and waste and wealds,  
Where the dead cry aloud on Our Lady of  
Victories,  
Queen of the Eagles, aloft on the shields,  
And the sun is gone up on the Thundering Legion  
On the roads of Rome to the battlefields.)

Ah, who had known who had not seen  
How soft and sudden on the fame  
Of my most noble English ships  
The sunset light of Carthage came  
And the thing I never had dreamed could be  
In the house of my fathers came to me  
Through the sea-wall cloven, the cloud and dark,  
A voice divided, a doubtful sea.

(The light is bright on the Tower of David,  
The evening glows with the morning star  
In the skies turned back and the days returning  
She walks so near who had wandered far  
And the heart of the swords, the seven times  
wounded,  
Was never wearied as our hearts are.)

How swift as with a fall of snow  
New things grow hoary with the light.  
We watch the wrinkles crawl like snakes  
On the new image in our sight.  
The lines that sprang up taut and bold  
Sag like primordial monsters old,  
Sink in the bas-reliefs of fossil  
And the slow earth swallows them, fold on fold.

But light are the feet on the hills of the morning  
Of the lambs that leap up to the Bride of the Sun,  
And swift are the birds as the butterflies flashing  
And sudden as laughter the rivulets run  
And sudden for ever as summer lightning  
The light is bright on the world begun.

Thou wilt not break as we have broken  
The towers we reared to rival Thee  
More true to England than the English  
More just to freedom than the free.  
O trumpet of the intolerant truth  
Thou art more full of grace and ruth  
For the hopes of the world than the world that made  
them,  
The world that murdered the loves of our youth.  
    Thou art more kind to our dreams, Our Mother,  
    Than the wise that wove us the dreams for shade.  
    God is more good to the gods that mocked Him  
    Than men are good to the gods they made.  
    Tenderer with toys than a boy grown brutal,  
    Breaking the puppets with which he played.

What are the flowers the garden guards not  
And how but here should dreams return?  
And how of hearths made cold with ruin  
The wide wind-scattered ashes burn—  
What is the home of the heart set free,  
And where is the nesting of liberty,  
And where from the world shall the world take shelter  
And man be master, and not with Thee?

    Wisdom is set in her throne of thunder,  
    The Mirror of Justice blinds the day—  
    Where are the towers that are not of the City,  
    Trophies and trumpeting, where are they?  
    Where over the maze of the world returning  
    The bye-ways bend to the King's highway.

## THE TWO MAIDENS

*"Robin loved Our Dear Lady  
And for doubt of deadly sin  
Would never hurt a company  
That any woman was in."*

Old Ballad of Robin Hood.

The wind had taken the tree-tops  
Upon Sherwood, the noble wood,  
Two maidens met in the windy ways  
Held speech of Robin Hood.

And the first maid to the second said  
"He keeps not tryst to-day."  
And the second said to the first maiden,  
"Mayhap he is far away."

And far away on the upland  
The last trees broke in the sky  
As they brought him out of grey Kirkleas  
To bend his bow and die.

High on the moors above Kirkleas  
The mighty thief lay slain,  
The woman that had struck him down  
He would not strike again.

And the maid cried as the high wind  
In the broken tree-tops cries,  
"They have taken him out of the good greenwood.  
And I know not where he lies.

"The world is a wind that passes  
And valour is in vain  
And the tallest trees are broken  
As the bravest men are slain

"Deep in the nettles of a ditch  
He may die as a dog dies  
Or on the gallows, to be the game  
Of the lawyers and the lies.

"The wood is full of wicked thieves,  
Of robbers wild and strong,  
But though he walked the gallows way,  
Of him I had no wrong.

"Because he scorned to do me scathe  
I walked forth clean and free  
And I call my name Maid Marian  
Because he honoured me."

"I too am only a simple maid,  
Our stories are the same.  
As your green gown to my blue gown  
Your name is like my name

"The world is full of wicked men,  
Of robbers rich and strong,

To plot against my maiden fame,  
But of him I had no wrong.

"And because he scorned to do me scathe  
I have travelled many a mile  
To bring you a word out of his mouth  
To lift your face and smile.

"He is not dead in the ditch-nettles  
Or on the gallows-tree;  
But a great king has taken him  
To ride with his chivalry.

"And made him a master of bowmen  
For the memory of the day  
When one that died at the king's right hand  
Was a thief on the king's highway.

"And I have travelled many a mile  
From a city beyond the sea  
To give you news of your true-love  
Because he honoured me."

## AN AGREEMENT

*Mr. William Clissold regards Birth-Control as the test of  
liberality: those against it are reactionary: those in favour are  
for the progressive revolution.*



Where you have laid it, let the sword divide:  
And your unmotherly Medea be  
Here sundered from our human trinity,  
The Mother and the Virgin and the Bride.

Why should we falter? Ours shall be the mirth  
And yours the amaze when you have thinned away  
Your starving serfs to fit their starveling pay  
And seen the meek inheriting the earth.

That Christ from this creative purity  
Came forth your sterile appetites to scorn.  
Lo: in her house Life without Lust was born,  
So in your house Lust without Life shall die.

## **IN OCTOBER**

Where are they gone that did delight in honour  
Abrupt and absolute as an epic ends,  
What light of the Last Things, like death at morning,  
Crowns the true lovers and the tragic friends?

Young priests with eager faces bright as eagles,  
Poor scholars of the harp-string, strict and strung,  
All the huge thirst of things irrevocable  
And all the intolerant innocence that died young.

The dark largesse of the last gesture flinging  
The glove in challenge or gold in sacrifice—  
Where are they gone that had delight in honour  
That the world grows so greedy and so wise?

Vow and averted head and high refusal  
Clean as the chasm where the dawn burns white,  
Where shall they go that have delight in honour  
When all men honour nothing but delight?

Out of the infinite came Finality,  
Freedom that makes unfathomably sure,  
For only a wind of all the widest windows  
Can close with such a clang that iron door:

The doors that cannot shut shall never open  
Nor men make windows when they make not walls,  
Though emptiness extend its endless prison  
In the white nightmare of its lengthening halls

Shall they not rise and seek beyond the mountains  
That which unsays not and is not forsworn?  
Where should they wander and in what other Eden  
Find the lost happiness of the hope forlorn,

Look in what other face for understanding,  
But hers who bore the Child that brought the Sword,  
Hang in what other house, trophy and tribute,  
The broken heart and the unbroken word?

This month of luminous and golden ruin  
Lit long ago the galleys and the guns.

Here is there nothing but such loitering rhyme  
As down the blank of barren paper runs,

As I write now, O Lady of Last Assurance,  
Light in the laurels, sunrise of the dead,  
Wind of the ships and lightning of Lepanto,  
In honour of Thee, to whom all honour is fled

## LAUGHTER

Say to the lover when the lane  
Thrills through its leaves to feel her feet  
"You only feel what smashed the slime  
When the first monstrous brutes could meet."  
Shall not the lover laugh and say  
(Whom God gives season to be gay)  
"Well for those monsters long ago  
If that be so; but was it so?"

Say to the mother when the son  
First springs and stiffens as for fight  
"So under that green roof of scum  
The tadpole is the frog's delight,  
So deep your brutish instincts lie."  
She will laugh loud enough and cry  
"Then the poor frog is not so poor.  
O happy frog! But are you sure?"

Ye learned, ye that never laugh,  
But say "Such love and litany  
Hailed Isis; and such men as you  
Danced by the cart of Cybele,"  
Shall I not say "Your cart at least  
Goes far before your horse, poor beast  
Like Her! You flatter them maybe,  
What do you think you do to me?"

## 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 thine  
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 that 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 thine 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 thine 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 thine 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-coloured 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.

## IMAGES

I saw a mirror like the moon  
    Made splendid by a sunken sun  
Framing the wrinkled face of kings  
    And haloed harlots one by one  
And many a judge with livid lips,  
    And many a thief with thankful eyes,  
Like his who climbed the torturing tree  
    And drank that night in Paradise;  
    And something like a floating word  
    Behind a curtain, overheard  
By chance, from a strange chamber, found me  
    "The mirror is a woman's eyes."  
    (*Speculum Justitiae, ora pro nobis.*)

Rose up through one clear rent of sky  
The midmost of a monstrous tower  
Far up, far down, all earthly scale  
Escaping in its pathless power  
Such strength as only burst from sight  
In some lost epic vast and wild  
Where giants piling up their tower  
Were pygmies by the thing they piled.  
And the heart knew without a word  
A strength below all strength had stirred  
Lifting the load of all the world  
A woman's arm under a child.  
(*Turris Davidica, ora pro nobis.*)

Broad was the house of burning gold  
Like sunrise standing on the mountains  
A million mirrored flames that glowed  
On golden peacocks, golden fountains,  
As tree by tree stood rayed with flame  
Like seven-branched candlestick or fan  
All glories in the Age of Gold  
Glowed equal when the world began  
But a voice speaking dreamily  
Said in my ear, but not to me,  
"One gold thread of a woman's hair  
Has blown across the eyes of man."  
(*Domus Aurea, ora pro nobis.*)

Deep in a silver wintry wood  
In secret skies where sleepers rove  
An ivory turret from the trees  
Rose clearer than the sky it clove



Too wan for flame, too warm for snow,  
Which gold most delicate would defile  
And near but never nearer growing  
Though one should labour mile on mile.  
And with it—in the flash that brings  
Sight of the world of little things,  
A woman's finger lifted up,  
A finger lifted with a smile.  
(*Turris Eburnea, ora pro nobis.*)

Down through the purple desolation  
Of deserts under stars they strode  
Who bore the dark and winged pavilion  
Of their ungraven god for load;  
Strange if the secret of the skies  
Behind low crimson curtains hid,  
Or if that vagrant booth defied  
The huge hypnotic Pyramid.  
Then, in an instant come and gone,  
Green fields and one that stood thereon  
Flashed like green lightning; and the thunder  
"A woman was his walking home."  
(*Foederis Arca, ora pro nobis.*)

O breakers! great Iconoclasts!  
When will your raking hammers find  
What statues spring up with a word,  
What icons have built up the mind,  
Or learn by hacking if the Form  
Be all a part or part a whole,  
Or grind out of your gods made dust  
What is the sign and what the soul

Or chase what images have hung  
In the air where any song was sung,  
Seeing if the sword can put asunder  
All that was wedded with the tongue?  
(*Sedes Sapientiae, ora pro nobis.*)

## THE TRINKETS

A wandering world of rivers,  
A wavering world of trees,  
If the world grow dim and dizzy  
With all changes and degrees,  
It is but Our Lady's mirror  
Hung dreaming in its place,  
Shining with only shadows  
Till she wakes it with her face.

The standing whirlpool of the stars,  
The wheel of all the world,  
Is a ring on Our Lady's finger  
With the suns and moons empearled  
With stars for stones to please her  
Who sits playing with her rings  
With the great heart that a woman has  
And the love of little things.

Wings of the whirlwind of the world  
From here to Ispahan,

Spurning the flying forests,  
Are light as Our Lady's fan:  
For all things violent here and vain  
Lie open and all at ease  
Where God has girded Heaven to guard  
Her holy vanities.

## **THE QUEEN OF SEVEN SWORDS\***

\*It will be obvious that the Seven Champions of Christendom who are here used as types of the different nations are only the imaginary paladins of the old boyish romance; and have no connection with the historical saints who bore their names.

I had dreamed of a desolate land, deformed to  
its crooked skyline,  
As if the round earth itself could be bent out of shape  
in its shame,  
Its plants stamped flat like a pattern, by marching  
of more than mammoths,  
Huge things, more naked and nameless; too old  
or new for a name.

And I knew what Spirit had passed, who is vast  
beyond meaning or measure,

The blank in the brain of the whirlwind, the hollow,  
the hungry thing,  
The Nothing that swells and desires, the void that  
devours and dismembers,  
In the heart of barbarian armies or the idle hours of  
a king.

Low light on the flat-topped hills, like headless  
creatures of chaos,  
Long shadows striping the slime, like ghosts laid  
flat in the grave,  
Low clouds lying flattened and spread, as if heaven  
itself lay prostrate;  
And I looked on the world-wide waste; and I  
said, "There is none to save"

I knew not if time out of mind, last night or now or  
to-morrow,  
Had broken that obscene dawn; on the strange,  
scarred hills I trod,  
I saw on their breaking terraces, cracking and sinking  
for ever,  
One shrine rise blackened and broken; like a last  
cry to God.

Old gold on the roof hung ragged as scales of a  
dragon dropping,  
The gross green weeds of the desert had spawned  
on the painted wood:  
But erect in the earth's despair and arisen against  
heaven interceding,

Whose name is Cause of Our Joy, in the doorway  
of death, she stood.

The Seven Swords of her Sorrow held out their  
hilts like a challenge,  
The blast of that stunning silence as a sevenfold  
trumpet blew  
Majestic in more than gold, girt round with a glory  
of iron,  
The hub of her wheel of weapons; with a truth  
beyond torture, true.

And it seemed as I gazed, from afar, from the cracks  
of the withering mountains,  
That seven sad knights came riding from seven  
points of the sky,  
Yet I knew their crests from of old, who had ridden  
in the faerie tourney,  
When all the days were daydreams, in the truant  
days gone by.

The green rust and the red had rotted their bronze  
and iron,  
The green slime and the grey had stained them with  
many lands.  
The sheath of the sword hung hollow; but before  
the shrine in the twilight  
They ranked their empty scabbards; they raised  
their empty hands.

And each man spoke, but in each was more than of  
one man speaking;

A sound as of many waters, a tumult of many men.  
And I heard through my heaving dream the noise  
    of the breaking of nations,  
And tribes that the terror scatters and the trumpet  
    gathers again.

## ST. JAMES OF SPAIN

Mine eyes were strong with sorrows; none  
    other blood shall say  
What lay on my heart for a hundred years ere the  
    stone was rolled away,  
When crushing the vines and statuary, the rock of  
    Mahound was hurled,  
Featureless, faceless, enormous; the rolling stone of  
    the world.

The haters of wine, the horsemen, came on us like  
    night at noon,  
The veiled knights with the crooked swords that  
    sware by the crooked moon  
We endured to go down under darkness, beholding,  
    as men that die,  
The name of their God of Battles scrawled backwards  
    across the sky.

Queen, if our own gold rotted what no man's iron  
    could rend,

Bronzed gold, dark wine of the dust; if we stiffened  
and stood at the end  
A gilded skeleton army brittle and brown in the sun,  
Forget not what all have forgotten; this field was won.

## ST. DENYS OF FRANCE

Mine eyes were fierce with fever; I was lord  
of the sleepless land  
Where the foot sticks to the stirrup and the sword-hilt  
to the hand,  
A torment of banners tossing when no wind blows  
Of the men that have made all marvels, except repose

On the East and the West gate graven our name was  
Victory;  
We took all nations captive that we might set them  
free;  
We could not endure the endurance of all slaves  
under the sun;  
We spat at them rights and riches, out of a gun.

Mother, if hell came after and the world laid waste  
for a word,  
If some of our blows fell upon thee, if some blows  
erred,  
It fell of a fury of justice that fell from thee—  
Lo, we have freed all peoples. Oh, set us free!

## ST. ANTHONY OF ITALY

Mine eyes were blind with splendours; I have  
stood too long in the sun.  
The heat and the light and the laurels, in the days  
when the world was one,  
And merry where all was ancient and careless where  
all was known,  
We dwelt in the gay glass houses that beckon the  
booby's stone.

The force of the foolish peoples, that herd, that  
follow a king,  
On the light-winged thought came crashing with  
the weight of a thoughtless thing  
And the Virgins, the high Republics, that were wed  
to the Vision and free,  
Imperial clowns took captive, holding in harlotry

Lady of lilies in heaven, thy lilies on earth burn red,  
We built and the wide world ruined; we wove and  
they rent the thread;  
We carved and the whole world shattered; we bound  
and the world disbands.  
In the day I arise for requital—hold thou mine hands.



## ST. PATRICK OF IRELAND

Mine eyes were alive with anger; for the gag  
was in my mouth.  
They bound me to a broken tree, with my face  
towards the South  
And hucksters watched and betted, when would  
the great heart break  
And pygmy pedants whipped me, for Thy name's sake

Thee, though the myrrh be bitter with the crushing  
of all sweet things,  
Though we fed upon hope and hatred, and the  
pride of the ragged kings  
And the two-edged sword of the spirit that wounds  
the hand,  
Torture could not take from us; this is thy land.

O smitten, O dolorous Mother, it the cross fall  
thwart of the crown,  
If thy rose grew dark in our garden, thy moon on  
our wrath went down,  
If too close be the cloud on Kiltartan, too deep the  
debt,  
Forgive us when we forgive not; let us forget

## ST. ANDREW OF SCOTLAND

Mine eyes were hard with horror; I walked  
on the heights alone  
And the winds were winged bulls walking, clashing  
their wings of stone,  
And the Lord was rolled in the thunder, like the  
Bible in the plaid,  
And for fear of the Feet above them, the stars went  
mad

On the seventh day from the seventh halted the  
earthquake feet,  
And they made an evil silence, a silence in the street.  
And men walked damned or chosen, as it was with  
the world begun,  
For the Day, that awaited all men, for us was done.

Mother of mirth and pardon, of laughter and tears  
and truce,  
Queen of the kind and careless knights that rode  
with the heart of Bruce,  
Does there not wait upon wisdom a last surprise?  
Are we not weary of wisdom? Oh, make us wise!

## ST. DAVID OF WALES

Mine eyes were shy with secrets; I was hunted  
to the hills,  
The shadow-hunt of the rider that, riding, never kills  
But is lost in the heights and hears, over horrible  
chasms hung,  
The voice of his vanished foeman sing in a strange  
tongue

But ours was the Hound of Arthur, whose leap was  
long as the day,  
And the buried name of Britain that none but the  
Druids say,  
And a song is hid in my speech; that sways like a  
tolling bell  
For the men that went forth to battle; but they  
always fell

Thine is no pride, Princess, in the proud, the palpable  
things,  
In the vast flat plans of the plains, that are traced  
in the charts of kings:  
He is thine that was born in the cavern, that died  
on the hill;  
A hymn is hid in my speech; it may cry to thee still.

**ST. GEORGE OF ENGLAND**

Mine eyes were sealed with slumber; I sat  
    too long at the ale.  
The green dew blights the banner; the red rust  
    eats the mail.  
And a spider spanned the chasm from the hand to  
    the fallen sword,  
And the sea sang me to sleep; for it called me lord

This was the hand of the hero; it strangled the  
    dragon's scream,  
But I dreamed so long of the dragon that the dragon  
    was a dream:  
And the knight that defied the dragon deserted the  
    princess.  
Her knight has stolen her dowry; she has no redress.

Mirror of Justice, shine on us; blaze though the  
    broad sky break  
Show us our face though it shatter us; shatter  
    and shake us awake!  
We were not tortured of demons, with Berber and Scot,  
We that have loved have failed thee Oh, fail us not!

## **ALL THE SEVEN**

"We have lost our swords in the battle; we  
    have broken our hearts in the world  
Since first we went forth from thy face with the

gonfalon's gold unfurled,  
Disarmed and distraught and dissundered thy  
paladins come  
From the lands where the gods sit silent. Art thou  
too dumb?"

They waited; and minute by minute the hush grew  
hollow with horror  
From doubt; till a far voice spoke, as faint with  
pain and apart,  
"Knew ye not, ye that seek, wherein I have hidden  
all things?  
Strewn far as the last lost battle; your swords have  
met in my heart."

And it seemed that the swords fell down with a  
shock as of thunderbolts falling,  
And the strange knights bent to gather and gird them  
again for the fight:  
All blackened; a bugle blew; but all in that flash  
of blackness,  
With the clang of the fallen swords, I awoke; and  
the sun was bright

[The end of *The Queen of Seven Swords* by G. K.  
Chesterton]