The Poetry of John Gray

Fletcher, Ian

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St. Peter’s Hymns

1925
Speciosae et Delicatae
Assimilavi Filiam Sion *

Tell us, shepherds, what you saw;
tell us, were you not afraid?
We saw the king of glory laid,
a babe, upon a little straw.

Neither of you was afraid;
neither were you filled with awe.
We saw him lying on the straw,
the baby; and we saw the maid.

Tell us, was the lady bright?
was the baby strange and rare?
Though we have travelled everywhere
we never saw so fair a sight.

Were there angels and a throne?
was the stable filled with light?
The maid was like a starry night;
and he was like a golden sun.

Tell us if the mother smiled;
tell us what the maiden said.
The babe was lying on his bed;
and she was looking at her child.

Shepherds twain, who speak so fair,
lead the way to Bethlehem.
An angel guided us to them;
and Bethlehem is everywhere.

Glory to God

The angels told the shepherds
Of Christ the Saviour’s birth:
To God in heaven be glory
And peace to men on earth.
We praise Thee and we bless Thee,
And magnify Thy name;
We pray that all Thy creatures
May always do the same.
We give Thee thanks for ever because Thou art so great,  
O God the King eternal,  
O Father uncreate.  
We bless the Name of Jesus  
The uncreated Son,  
Begotten of the Father  
And with the Father one.

O Lamb of God, who takest  
The sins of men away,  
Have mercy on us sinners  
And hear us when we pray.  
For Thou alone art holy;  
And Thou alone art Lord;  
Together with the Father  
And Holy Ghost adored.

To God

Children in Thy presence met,  
Fill our hearts with holy fear;  
Father, be compassionate;  
God of mercy, hear.

Though we do not yet by sight,  
God most high, behold Thy face,  
Pour into our minds the light  
Of Thy saving grace.

Tender Father, gracious Friend,  
Mighty one, tremendous Lord,  
Unto all the ages’ end  
Be Thy name adored.

Glory to the Father be;  
To the uncreated Son;  
Blessed Spirit, praise to Thee;  
God for ever one.
God’s Bounty

The eyes of all look up
In hope, O God, to Thee;
Their platter and their cup
They set for Thee to see
Upon their empty board;
And wait upon thee still,
Their Father and their Lord,
Their emptiness to fill.

Where’er the needy stand
And watch the season’s round
Thou openest Thy hand
And blessings all abound.
Where ever fledgelings call
Or human children cry
Thy bounty feedeth all,
And unto all is nigh.

Let Us Bless the Lord

Everything that God has made,
All the creatures of the Lord:
Sun on high and flowers that fade,
Things that hop and walk and wade,
Let us bless the Lord.

Bird and insect, all that fills
Glade and coppice, heath and sward,
All that lives by rocks and rills,
Cattle on a thousand hills,
Let us bless the Lord.

Children, black and brown and white,
Praise His name with one accord;
Like the angels in His sight,
In His home of dazzling light,
Let us bless the Lord.

With the saints in deep array,
Those who reap the great reward,
(Out of every nation they)
Praising God both night and day,
Let us bless the Lord.
Higher than the skylark sings,
Or the eagle ever soared,
Far beyond the flight of wings,
Yea, with all created things,
Let us bless the Lord.

Consecration

He blessed the bread; His Body gave
To those whom He would die to save.
He blessed the wine; His blood He poured:
Partake the chalice of the Lord.

O God, upon Thine altar spread,
Behold the cup of wine, the bread;
Thy gifts Thy Self about to be,
O God, in memory of Thee.

The bread was baked; the wine was pressed;
And Thou, O God, hast done the rest.
O work divine, the simple food
Becomes Thy Body and Thy Blood.

O miracle beyond all price;
O fruit of love and sacrifice;
O pledge of triumph o'er the grave;
O Bread for which the angels crave.

Joy after sorrow; rest from strife;
No more the living Bread, but life;
The very Truth for what was true;
To drink with Thee the wine anew.

To the Blessed Sacrament

O God of might
    In splendour throned,
    With glory crowned
In endless light;
For ever be
    Thy name renowned,
And more abound
The praise of Thee.

To the Holy Ghost

O Spirit of the Father and the Son,
    The Victor Jesus sent Thee from above;
Thy children are not orphan or undone
    When Thou art with them, O Eternal Love.
Thou burnest, blindest not, celestial Sun;
    Thy wings are noiseless, spiritual Dove.
Make Thy familiar home in hearts of Thine,
    And breathe in them the vivifying breath;
Enliven them with that mysterious wine,
    Of thoughts that gladden life and conquer death.
Speak in our spirits' ears, O Voice divine,
    The memorable words the Master saith.

O Almoner of God, Thy gifts bestow,
    In token of Thy presence, Thou Unseen;
Instruct the mind to understand and know
    Enough of what shall be, of what has been.
Let mortal hearts with tender rapture glow;
    Strong in Thy love, and in Thy peace serene.

Advent *

Arouse, O Lord, the fainting heart
To clear the Saviour's ways;
And through His grace, deserve the part
To serve Him and to praise
    Thy only uncreated Son;
    Thy sole-begotten, blessed One.

Incline, o Lord, a gracious ear;
Receive our humble prayers;
Lighten our darkness; banish fear;
And take away our cares;
    Oh, show the brightness of Thy face;
    Oh, pour abroad Thy healing grace.
Arouse, O Lord, Thy powerful aid,
And come to us in might;
For sin has made our hearts afraid;
And weary is our plight.
   Oh, let Thy kind indulgence speed
   The gracious help we sorely need

Advent

The world is cold and dark;
The winter season drear;
A Voice divine is sounding; hark,
The tones are soft and clear.
   The Lord is near.

The hope of brighter days
Must through the darkness peer
To catch the trace of early rays
Which in the east appear.
   The Lord is near.

Oh, ring, tremendous Voice,
In every waking ear;
Let those who hear the sound rejoice,
And those who slumber hear.
   The Lord is near.

O Sun of justice, rise
And rid the world of fear.
Announce the day that never dies,
The everlasting year.
   The Lord is near.

Advent

A trumpet voice is calling clear,
   The Baptist in the waste:
Arise; and lend attentive ear;
The time is short; the Lord is near;
   Make haste.
The world is now a wilderness;  
   The Church uplifts the voice;  
The Lord will banish all distress;  
He comes to pardon, heal and bless;  
   Rejoice.

The captive sigh for their release,  
   The succour from above;  
Oh, grant Thy people faith's increase,  
To worship Thee in holy peace  
   And love.

Thy law the guide of all their ways,  
   Have mercy on them; then  
In that most terrible of days  
May every one receive his praise,  
   Amen.

Nativity  *

Let every child adore His name,  
And all His Angels shout for joy;  
This day the mighty God became  
A Mother's little Boy.

He came and lived on earth a while,  
To be with us and share our pain;  
To teach and heal and reconcile  
And lead to God again.

He suffered more than anyone,  
Until the end He sought was gained;  
And all the work He did was done;  
And never once complained.

Epiphany  *

When in the crib, so weak and small,  
The Saviour lay, there came the Wise  
To worship Him, the Lord of all,  
Whose star they saw in other skies.  
Thy glory drew the wise from far;  
Thy messenger a shining star.
St. Peter's Hymns 1925

When Jesus came to be baptised  
The Spirit hovered as a dove;  
And those who saw were yet surprised  
To hear the Father's voice above,  
Commending the eternal Son,  
The well-beloved, O blessed One.

At Cana, in the holy land,  
The bridegroom and his guests recline;  
And, at the Saviour's mere command,  
The water vessels pour with wine.  
They wondered, Lord; but blest are they  
Who do whatever Thou shalt say.

Oh, grant us to be truly wise;  
To seek the things that are above;  
To look to Thee with humble eyes,  
Thy word to heed, and Thee to love.  
And guide us to the place, O Lord,  
Where Thou art evermore adored.

Palm Sunday

Jesus comes in royal state,  
Riding through the city gate;  
Crowds of people on Him wait.  
Hosanna.

With what meek and measured pace  
Rides the Captain of our race,  
Mildness beaming from His face.  
Hosanna.

This is He who, by and by,  
Bears the Cross on which to die;  
While they bellow "Crucify".  
Hosanna.

Ride, Thou gentle Cavalier,  
To my heart, to Thee so dear,  
All its ways are swept and clear.  
Hosanna.
St. Peter's Hymns 1925

Sweet with penance, void of pride;
Look, its gate is open wide
Unto Thee, Thou Crucified.
    Hosanna.

Glory to the Father be;
To the Spirit; and to Thee;
Blessed Holy Trinity.
    Hosanna.

Ascension

The Lord forsook the world, and went
Beyond the starry firmament;
And those who saw the Lord depart
Were gazing after Him intent.
    Alleluia.

Two Angels stood before them then,
Who said: Ye Galilean men,
As now in clouds He disappears,
This very Lord shall come again.
    Alleluia.

A bright innumerable band,
The ministering spirits stand,
And, trembling, see created flesh
Enthroned with God at God's right hand.
    Alleluia.

In heaven, where Thou dost receive
All honour it is God's to give,
Grant to Thy fellow-men at least
In mind and heart with Thee to live.
    Alleluia.

And when, terrific, Thou shalt come
In power, majesty, and doom,
Assemble those who have believed,
And lead them to Thy heavenly home.
    Alleluia.
St. Peter's Hymns 1925

All glory to the Father be;
And to the Spirit; and to Thee,
Who scalest heaven on steps of stars;
Eternal, undivided Three.
Alleluia.

Pentecost

The friends of Jesus, when he rose
The first Ascension day,
Stayed where they were, until He chose
To guide their steps away.

They waited on His promises
With Jesus' Mother dear.
"He would not leave them comfortless,
A prey to doubt and fear".

"He would not leave the little flock
He purchased with His Blood
To bear alone the weight and shock
Of darkness, storm and flood".

All waiting at Jerusalem
The Holy Spirit came
And sat on every head of them
In parted tongues of flame.

Ah, then their hearts were all ablaze,
And then their faith was strong,
And then they found a voice of praise
In every kind of tongue.

O gentle Spirit, come and dwell
In every waking heart;
To make of each Thy citadel,
And never hence depart.

Offering

Direct, O Lord, my suppliant eyes,
And guide my prayer aright,
That every word to Thee may rise
Like incense in Thy sight.
My morning offering receive;  
And so, through all my days,  
Until my life's declining eve,  
A sacrifice of praise.

That I may measure speech, O Lord,  
And value silence more,  
Set Thou upon my lips a guard,  
And at my mouth a door.

Let not the rebel heart betray  
The tongue's appointed use,  
Or make it run the evil way  
Of malice and excuse.

Act of Contrition

My God, because Thou art so good,  
And always hatest sin,  
Would that I loved Thee as I should,  
And ever true had been.

I grieve that I have greatly erred,  
And gone my wilful way,  
Even as one who, having heard,  
Refuses to obey.

But now, my God, with all my soul  
And heart and mind and strength,  
I love my Saviour best of all,  
In breadth and depth and length.

If Thou wilt be my gracious Friend,  
For all the world can give  
No more will I my God offend  
The longest day I live.

Act of Contrition

My God, I own that I have sinned,  
And grievous wrong have done;  
My mind is fickle as the wind,  
And changeful as the moon.
My God, I do sincerely grieve
For sins, and sins alone;
And penance gratefully receive,
If thus I might atone.

And now, my God, I offer Thee
My purpose to amend.
With grace of Thine to strengthen me,
I say that I intend:
To serve my God with might and main,
And never to offend;
To keep my heart without a stain
And Thee my life-long Friend.

Prayer for Souls in Purgatory

Ah, tender Lord, release at last
The souls whom Thou hast died to save;
The place in which their lot is cast
Is darker than the deepest grave.
   Oh, let their eyes discern
   The city on the height;
   Oh, bring the souls that yearn
   Into Thy place of light.

They walk no more in busy ways;
They look no more on fields and hills;
They pass alone unnumbered days;
And God their cup with sorrow fills.
   The city which is fair
   Is hidden from their sight;
   No sun is needed there,
   For Thou art all its light.

Have pity, O incarnate Word.
These were not faithless, but believed;
Thy name with reverence they heard;
And of Thy bounty much received.
   And with the happy throng
   Let these with joy sit down;
   Thy praise their endless song;
   And Thou their shining Crown.
Purgatory

In darkness and in pain
The holy souls abide;
They know that Thou hast died
That they may live and reign;
But far from heaven and Thee
They bear their burning chains,
While yet a jot remains
Of sin's terrific fee.

Ah, think how once they used
Thyself, the living Food;
And asked for what they would;
And nothing was refused.
Contrition is their bread;
They may not speak their need;
Their patience cannot plead;
They lie uncomfotred.

Thou heedest not their sighs,
Though dear to Thee they be.
Thy stern and just decree
Withholds Thy pitying eyes.
And yet Thy mercy strains
To further any prayer,
The least desire to share
Or mitigate their pains.

By all the pains Thine own,
The dread, the shame, the scorn,
So wonderfully borne,
To merit and atone,
Oh, shorten days and years;
Rub out the lingering stain;
Release a soul from pain;
And wipe away the tears.