

BEFORE A CRUCIFIX

Based on a blasphemous poem of the same title by Swinburne, from which are taken the first lines of the 33 stanzas of my poem.

*Here, down between the dusty trees,
Flailed, harrowed by the harrying rain,
With arms upraised, upon their knees,
Tormented by internal pain,
Pale fugitives bearing Christ on Cross
Dedicate their suffering and their loss.*

*The suns have branded black, the rains
Washed out the bloom upon their cheeks,
When throwing off the Tyrants' chains
They fled their homes from secret creeks
To reach a land where they could live
As God's free men — forget, forgive.*

*God of this grievous people, wrought
With deepest misery of long grief,
Must their sad groans avail them naught,
Their loyalty and their strong belief?
Pity them, O Jesus Crucified,
For whose salvation Thou hast died.*

*It was for this then, that thy speech
Thy Sermon on the Mountain, Lord,
The hungry multitudes did teach
To love the Truth, nor fear the Sword
Or the quick poison of the Snake,
But suffer bravely for thy sake?*

*It was for this, that prayers like these
From wounded heart and tortured mind
Like hunted birds from trap-laid trees
Flew up to God, Father most kind,
Whose Son pale tyrants nailed on Wood
Fashioned by Hatred — Holy Rood.*

*It was for this, that men should make
Thy Name the Clarion of New Age,
That men and women should forsake
Their homes for Thine, and fill with rage
The vaults of Hell where Greed and Lust,
Two wicked devils, writhe in dust.*

*The 'twentieth' wave of the ages rolls
Like one huge boulder crushing down
Millions of serfs, distracted souls,
Whom Satan herds in his Black Town,
Satan who hates not less than Man,
God his creator and His ban.*

*Nay, if indeed 'you' be not dead
To vile Offence that cast you out,
If you that hate Christ have not shed
His grace entirely, if you but doubt
Your grave misdeeds, return to God
In sackcloth and your feet unshod.*

*Thy faith is fire upon their lips,
Blessed Son of Mary, crucified
By those whose souls the Devil grips
As with a vice, who mock, deride
The sovereignty of the God of Love
Who rules this planet from above.*

*The toothèd thorns that bit thy brows,
The nails that bored thy gentle hands,
And blood-soaked feet, excite, arouse
Grief and remorse in all Man's lands.
The Fugitives and those who died
Take comfort from Christ Crucified.*

*The binding buffets on thine head
Are borne by men that follow Thee;
Shot, hunted men who eat their bread
Soaked with their tears; gaunt Mindzenty,
And other martyrs everywhere
Whom foul Vindictiveness does not spare.*

With iron for thy linen bands

The scoffing scoundrels fouled thy grave,
Blasphemed thy name in all thy lands,
And mocking said: Come down to save
Thy priests and nuns, thy holy men
Herded like animals in a den.

But these have not the rich man's grave,
To sleep in when their time is done:
On Judgement Day will Satan save
His evil hordes, dethrone the Son
Of God who judgement shall pronounce,
When He such violence will denounce?

They have no tomb to dig, and hide
Who would the mountains fell on them;
Or the high billows roared astride
Their piled-up bones to halt and stem
The vengeful tides of Judgement Day
That shrink their souls with dumb dismay.

Through the left hand a nail is driven,
With how much hatred and contempt
For Christ's warm blood so freely given
To wash us clean, set free, exempt
The heirs of Sin from primal doom —
The curse, the exile and the gloom.

And priests against the mouth divine
The priests of Jahwe, God of Life,
Who asked, and then refused, the Sign
Put their vile mouths, hearts full of strife.
Then Judas kissed Him, foulest lie!
Hell's snakes hissed curses: 'Christ must die!'

O sacred head, O desecrate,
White hands that blessed the multitudes,
Burn clean the mouths that imprecate,
Forgive Man's violence, wars and feuds:
Free us before it is too late,
Before the Shepherd shuts the Gate.

Is there a gospel in the red
Blood-soakèd Book of Marxist fist
To match thy Gospel truly read,
Thy Word of life, pondered and kist
By those whom Tyranny drives like sheep
Disbanded, starving, without sleep?

O Son of man, beneath men's feet
Remove the load of human pride;
Wipe clean thy face, so pale, so sweet
The face beloved of thy Bride,
Thy Bride for whom so many search —
Thy Bride and Child, the Catholic Church.

The soldiers and the high priests part
Thy vesture; so thy Church divide
The howling wolves with Satan's art
And foul Thy name and wrong thy Bride.
One Shepherd, but how many flocks?
One Peter, but how many rocks?

No fragment of it save the name
Of true Christianity have they left;
Her book of History and their shame
Their fathers' Church disowned, bereft
Of her white glory and her right
Now silenced, gagged by Satan's might.

And we seek yet if God or man
Shall win the Battle of the World;
The Son of Cain under thy ban
His pirates' banner borne unfurled,
Or God, the Master of the field,
Who parries blows with Honour's shield.

And mouldering now and hoar with moss
Lie all the guns and tanks of Hell.
Proclaim the Victory of the Cross,
Blow David's bugle, ring the bell,
For Christ has won, Christ on the Cross:
Christ's medal strike, His Face emboss!

It creaks and rocks to left and right
 The Prison Gate of Satan's hordes
 That damn their souls to grasp his might,
 Drowned in their blood by their own swords.
 Their time of triumph passes fleet.
 Their idols wobble on their feet.

Thou, in the day that breaks thy prison,
 As Peter broke his prison chains,
 And Thou thy shrouds from death arisen,
 Immortal Christ, let the white rains
 Of Grace divine transform the earth,
 And purge of sin our mortal birth.

Set not thine hand unto their cross
 If that be not the Cross of Christ;
 They forged their chains and wrought their loss
 By their own Lust and Pride chastised:
 They that have spat upon Thy Face
 Have brought dishonour on our race.

This dead God here against my face
 The Son of God, my One True Friend,
 Feels cold while I with tears embrace
 His Body, and my arms extend
 Around the Rood that holds Him high,
 That saw Him gasp, cry loud and die.

The Tree of Faith ingrafted by priests
 Who preached the first Apostles' Creed,
 Stands firm for aye though Satan's beasts,
 Chimaeras from their dungeons freed,
 With their sharp fangs turn up the soil
 To seer the Tree, God's will to foil.

O hidden face of man, wherever
 You turn your guilty eyes you see
 Charred fields of Drought and Dearth: never
 Can Master Satan set slaves free.
 Your fealty swear to Christ, the King,
 Take up His Cross, His anthems sing.

So when our souls look back to thee,
 Wronged Son of Miriam, Son of God,
 And see thee hang upon the Tree
 Of CRIME and SHAME, we dread the rod
 That flails the backs of Lust and Pride
 Who have conspired to kill Thy Bride.

When we would see thee man, and know
 Thou art the Christ, our friend, our guide,
 Though on the Cross, head hanging low,
 We know the Bridegroom and the Bride:
 Thou art the Christ killed for our sake –
 The spine of Satan bruise and break!

Thou bad'st let children come to thee;
 Spurn us not, Master, shamefaced sinners;
 Receive the sailors back from sea;
 Poor waifs or babies, small beginners.
 From thy tall Cross let Love look down
 And from thy servants take the Crown.

Nay, if their God and thou be one...
 Stop, unbeliever, dare you doubt
 That Christ Our Lord is God's own Son?
 With voice of thunder hear him shout:
 Behold my Son, King of New Nation:
 His Cross the Archway of Salvation.

8.i.62