

Bothering God

time there was
one summer end of spring
when I was out and down
full of the nagging doubt that keeps me sane
that selfsame doubt
still often drives you mad
I came across a trusted long time friend
who I had not yet seen for many years
and told him of my catalogue of woes
in hope he could give succour to my soul

he I noticed had become transformed
those weary shadows that impend with age
had it would seem quite left his brow untouched
and in his eye a toxicated gleam
that seemed to emanate from some far place
unvisited by likes of you and me

‘I have found God’
he told me without hint
of irony, quip, or satire in his tone
‘He’s saved me and you He can save too;
if His forgiveness
you will take to heart:
then will your nervous nightmares soon be stilled
and all your tribulations will be gone.’

'And if I do?' I asked of him intrigued
that he of all my friends had come to this
when we were both so large with sacrilege
so rich in blasphemy when we were young

'I turned from Satan's path when I was saved
and met the Lord and Master of my soul.
All who come to him will see His light
and His forgiving mercy may receive.'

in previous times
I would have laughed at this
derided him his flight from intellect;
to barter judgement for the Judgement Day
is not the usual way to gain respect
from ancient jaded skeptics like myself
schooled in Marx and matter and denial
of all things opiate upon the mind
likely to sap the struggle from the vein.

and anyway I wasn't ready yet
to make a clean breast and scrub clear the sheet:
I'd lasted hithertofore within the world
and grown well fond of my old sinning ways

and yet I must admit he took me back
to childish days spent in the choirstall
and hints of hymnals, chants and choruses
sacred anthems, carols, antiphons
sang somewhere deep within my sordid self
to bring to mind the memory long eregone
when given the music
I could vow belief

and yes I thought
perhaps the time has come
when I should seek transcendence from the sky
and catch again the shimmer in the sun
and ask no questions how and whence it came
or who first lit the universal flame

'Yes' he continued 'we shall all be saved:
at the Last Trump
all they who do believe
will inherit from the heavenly host
a new pure Earth devoid of worldly sin:
you too can be there in the Final Days
if you relinquish doubt and come to Him
your one and only Saviour
He who died
to cleanse the souls of all who would believe!'

‘And what’ I asked ‘ of those who still refuse
to lockstockbarrel share this absolute;
those who maintain a contrary belief
or still remain in existential doubt?’

his eyes at this point lost their lustrous sheen
and came a zealous glimmer to his gaze;
‘They will be damned!’ he eagerly declared
‘Condemned to suffer all eternity
in cursed affliction and infernal pain
and baneful penitence for unbelief
until the Day of Anger is at hand!’

as far as I could see
I told my friend
we had no need to wait til judgement day:
the earth itself was hell enough for most
what with pollution, wars, and penury

‘These things’ he said ‘were ever meant to be:
part of His vengeance and His mystery;
if we accept what happens here below
we will garner riches from on high
and gain his mercy when we meet with Him
at the Last Days upon the Earth
when all those who deny His Holy Name
will writhe forever in the Devil’s Pit!’

the god I once believed in
spoke of peace
redemption
benediction
holy grace
he healed the stricken
and espoused the poor
and suffered us to turn the other cheek

the god my friend embraced so utterly
that he had left his senses at the font
seemed not one who would feed the multitude
attend the sick or praise the blessed meek
but one who would wreak havoc in His wake
while He was smiting sin and raising Cain:
a man of massacre not miracle
who slaughtered heathens for his Father's sake
who never lightened but inflicted pain
whose sword was mighty and whose justice fierce -
this was crusader, never carpenter:
no sacrifice who linger'd on the tree:
this was a Christ that killed upon the cross
whose heart
 nor eye
 nor hand
could ever soften;
the centuries have met this god too often

us Capricorns
who hoof upon the earth
and look above to stars
not myths or creeds
and wonder at their primal chemistry
cannot ignore the world that we have made
and must unmake if we are not to be
damned by the fruits of our destructive hand
and reap the harvest of stupidity

and I would hope that there would still be time
for humankind to find some other path
let not the holocaust be final trump
let not the atom write this epitaph:

‘ while superstition reigned and reason slept
along the planet us and Jesus wept’

I thanked my once and long-ago lost friend
(though I was who was lost cause in his eyes)
for showing such inordinate concern
for my far gone and dissipated soul ;
with his firm faith and fearsome certainty
I wished him well and sent him on his way

beyond the gravestone let him greet his god
upon the hillside I shall look for lambs