

# **A VISION OF LIFE; POEMS**

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A vision of life; poems by Darrell Figgis & G. K. Chesterton

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**DARRELL FIGGIS & G. K. CHESTERTON**

**A VISION OF  
LIFE; POEMS**



**A VISION OF LIFE**  
POEMS. BY DARRELL FIGGIS  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION &  
BY GILBERT K. CHESTERTON



LONDON : JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD  
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TO  
MY WIFE

FOR nigh four years now have these poems sought to snuff the open breeze, returning ever to me broken and disappointed. What bitterness was in this—how deep you alone know!—was yours also; but I alone knew that rarer bounty of your instant and un-failing comfort. Therefore, dear, these poems are dedicate to you beyond my power to alter or avert; and it lies for me now but to confirm the finding of the years.



INTRODUCTION  
BY G. K. CHESTERTON

**T**HERE are signs of a certain stirring in English poetry, a minor Renaissance of which Francis Thompson may be regarded as the chief ensign and example. It is partly the Elizabethan spirit, that permanent English thing working its way again to the surface; but, of course, like every Renaissance, it is in many ways unlike its origin and model. It is as true in art as it is in religion, that when a man is born again, he is born different. And the latest Elizabethanism has differed not only from the actual Elizabethan work, but from other revivals of it. The great romantic movement which was at its height about the beginning of the nineteenth century, the movement of which Coleridge is perhaps the most typical product,



this movement was and even claimed to be a return to the Elizabethan inspiration. This, of course, it was in its revolt against the rhymed rationalism of Pope, in its claim that poetry was a sort of super-sense which Pope would have called nonsense. But there were two elements in the Coleridge and Wordsworth movement which prevented it, splendid as it was, from being perfectly Elizabethan.

The first was a certain craze for simplicity, even for a somewhat barbaric simplicity; a craze which was much connected with the growing influence of Germany and the purely Northern theory of our national origin. People were trying to be Anglo-Saxon instead of English. In style and diction this produced an almost pedantic plainness and love of Teutonic roots which, whatever else it was, was utterly antagonistic to the spirit of the Elizabethans. This business of the plain Saxon speech is entirely appropriate as eulogy on certain suitable things, such as the translation of the Bible; it is permissible as eulogy, but it

is intolerable as condemnation. It is certainly part of the beauty of Bunyan's work that it is built out of plain words, just as it is part of the beauty of Westminster Cathedral that it is built out of plain bricks. But as for saying that no building shall be built out of stone or marble or timber, that is quite another matter, and quite an unreasonable one. Coleridge, in the *Ancient Mariner*, did frequently manage strange and fine effects with the bald words of a ballad. But because I will not go without—

“They fixed on me their stony eyes  
That in the moon did glitter,”

is no reason at all why I should go without—

“Re-visits thus the glimpses of the moon.”

The richness and variegation of the old Elizabethan style permitted peculiar and poignant effects which the Wordsworthian ballad, and even the Tennysonian lyric, did not attempt to revive. The principal objection to writing Anglo-Saxon instead of English is, after all, a very simple one: it is that the Anglo-Saxon

vocabulary is one of the smallest in the world, while the English vocabulary is one of the largest.

Mr. Darrell Figgis is one of those who give this impression of a latter-day return to the Elizabethan spirit; that is, to the real Elizabethan spirit which the romantic movement omitted—the spirit of Elizabethan enrichment and involution. The element to which I refer is already sufficiently well known in the work of Francis Thompson, in whom it could be, and indeed has been, called, not only Elizabethan complexity, but even Elizabethan affectation. The work of Mr. Darrell Figgis is less elaborate than that extreme though triumphant example; but it has the same essential qualities of sustained and systematic metrical style, of line linked with line in a process requiring the reader's attention, and remote in its very nature from the startling simplicity of the old romantic ballad. If this kind of poetry prevails, people will have to listen to it rather as they listen to good and rather difficult music, not as they