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Chesterton in Heaven

by Jennifer Woodruff Tait

Jennifer Woodruff Tait is an Episcopal priest, the managing editor of *Christian History* magazine, the content editor for The High Calling at the Theology of Work Project, and the author of *The Poisoned Chalice* and the poetry collection *Histories of Us*. She lives in Richmond, KY with her husband Edwin, daughters Catherine Elanor and Elizabeth Beatrice, in-laws, 26 goats, 16 chickens, and a laptop. She invites everyone to check out *Christian History's* 2015 issue on *The Seven Sages* (MacDonald, Tolkien, Lewis, Williams, Chesterton, Sayers, and Barfield).

The wine flowed free enough for friends,
The chairs were large as thrones,
The walls were white with blazoned saints
When God's great child came home.
For him who sang of all the songs
The wildest and the best
God's minstrels waited at the gate
To welcome him to rest;
And Heaven was a lovely inn,
The door flung open wide
The Keeper standing in the door
With all the world inside.

He threw his faded hat away,
He cast his cape behind,
He hurled his staff into the night
And carelessly he climbed
Through all the lower clouds of God
Up to the golden height
Lit by the windows of the inn
And burning day and night;
The crowd was round him at the close—
Their wingéd mystery beat
On every shining windowpane
Along the golden street.

He seized their hands and touched their wings

As each passed into view;
He called them by the names they bore
When earth was all they knew—
Said “Dickens” with a choking sound,
Said “Stevenson” and “Scott,”
And took the wine from open hands
And gazed like one forgot.
His father’s eyes, his mother’s face,
His brother, tall and proud;
They spoke not, but no other peace
Has ever spoke so loud.

But through the multitude his eyes
Saw keenly who was gone,
Not yet arrived, but laboring still
And waiting to come on.
He missed a City-magnate’s hat,
A boyish grin below,
The first and wittiest of all friends
A man might ever know;
He missed a sturdy-shouldered man
With French eyes and English chin
(The gates of Heaven were not yet wide
To let poor Hilary in.)
He missed a hush of blue and green,
He missed an elvish face,
And all the angels round could not
Fill up that empty place.

But all the crowd, they took his hand
And led him to the door,
That inn where all earth’s wanderers
Can never wander more.
That Keeper keeps the doors of light
Who guards the gates of pain,
For darkness is as light to Him
Who has death’s darkness slain;
And when the pilgrim bent in joy,
In passion like a child,
The Innkeeper looked down on him
And all His glory smiled.