

1861

AFTER THREE DAYS

Lewis Carroll

Carroll, Lewis (pen name of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) (1832-1898) - English novelist, poet, photographer, and mathematician, best known for his fantastical childrens' classics. He was a mathematical lecturer at Oxford. After Three Days (1861) - One of Lewis Carroll's poems. "Written after seeing Holman Hunt's picture, 'The Finding of Christ in the Temple.'" Opening lines: I stood within the gate / Of a great temple, 'mid the living stream...

AFTER THREE DAYS

["Written after seeing Holman Hunt's picture, The Finding of Christ in the Temple."]

I STOOD within the gate Of a great temple, 'mid the living stream Of worshippers that thronged its regal state Fair-pictured in my dream.

Jewels and gold were there; And floors of marble lent a crystal sheen To body forth, as in a lower air, The wonders of the scene.

Such wild and lavish grace Had whispers in it of a coming doom; As richest flowers lie strown about the face Of her that waits the tomb.

The wisest of the land

Had gathered there, three solemn trysting-days, For high debate: men stood on either hand To listen and to gaze.

The aged brows were bent, Bent to a frown, half thought, and half annoy, That all their stores of subtlest argument Were baffled by a boy.

In each averted face I marked but scorn and loathing, till mine eyes Fell upon one that stirred not in his place, Tranced in a dumb surprise.

Surely within his mind Strange thoughts are born, until he doubts the lore Of those old men, blind leaders of the blind, Whose kingdom is no more.

Surely he sees afar A day of death the stormy future brings; The crimson setting of the herald-star That led the Eastern kings.

Thus, as a sunless deep Mirrors the shining heights that crown the bay, So did my soul create anew in sleep The picture seen by day.

Gazers came and went A restless hum of voices marked the spot In varying shades of critic discontent Prating they knew not what.

"Where is the comely limb, The form attuned in every perfect part, The beauty that we should desire in him?" Ah! Fools and slow of heart!

Look into those deep eyes, Deep as the grave, and strong with love divine; Those tender, pure, and fathomless mysteries, That seem to pierce through thine.

Look into those deep eyes, Stirred to unrest by breath of coming strife, Until a longing in thy soul arise That this indeed were life:

That thou couldst find Him there, Bend at His sacred feet thy willing knee, And from thy heart pour out the passionate prayer, "Lord, let me follow Thee!"

But see the crowd divide:

Mother and sire have found their lost one now:

The gentle voice, that fain would seem to chide, Whispers, "Son, why hast thou" In tone of sad amaze "Thus dealt with us, that art our dearest thing? Behold, thy sire and I, three weary days, Have sought thee sorrowing."

And I had stayed to hear The loving words, "How is it that ye sought?" -

But that the sudden lark, with matins clear, Severed the links of thought.

Then over all there fell Shadow and silence; and my dream was fled, As fade the phantoms of a wizard's cell When the dark charm is said.

Yet, in the gathering light, I lay with half-shut eyes that would not wake, Lovingly clinging to the skirts of night For that sweet vision's sake.

Feb. 16, 1861.

THE END