

THE WIFE OF FLANDERS

G. K. Chesterton

a poem

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Low and brown barns, thatched and repatched and tattered,
Where I had seven sons until to-day—
A little hill of hay your spur has scattered...
This is not Paris. You have lost the way.

You, staring at your sword to find it brittle,
Surprised at the surprise that was your plan,
Who, shaking and breaking barriers not a little,
Find never more the death-door of Sedan.

Must I for more than carnage call you claimant,
Paying you a penny for each son you slay?
Man, the whole globe in gold were no repayment
For what you have lost. And how shall I repay?

What is the price of that red spark that caught me
From a kind farm that never had a name?
What is the price of that dead man they brought me?
For other dead men do not look the same.

How should I pay for one poor graven steeple
Whereon you shattered what you shall not know?
How should I pay you, miserable people,
How should I pay you everything you owe?

Unhappy, can I give you back your honour?
Though I forgave, would any man forget?
While all the great green land has trampled on her
The treason and terror of the night we met.

Not any more in vengeance or in pardon
One old wife bargains for a bean that's hers.
You have no word to break; no heart to harden.
Ride on and prosper. You have lost your spurs.



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