

By C. S. Lewis

*The Abolition of Man*  
*Mere Christianity*  
*The Great Divorce*  
*The Problem of Pain*

*The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*  
*The Screwtape Letters* (with "Screwtape Proposes a Toast")  
*Miracles*

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*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*  
*Prince Caspian*  
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*That Hideous Strength*  
*Out of the Silent Planet*  
*The Joyful Christian*  
*The Visionary Christian*

*George MacDonald: An Anthology*  
*C. S. Lewis: Letters to Children*, edited by Lyle W. Dorsett  
and Marjorie Lamp Mead

*They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greenes*  
(1914-1963), edited by Walter Hooper

*The Essential C. S. Lewis*, edited by Lyle W. Dorsett

# THE ESSENTIAL C. S. LEWIS

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY LYLE W. DORSETT



A TOUCHSTONE BOOK  
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Of the cold world, reminding me on what a place  
I crawl and cling, a planet with no bulwarks, out in space.

Never the white sun of the wintriest day  
Struck me as *un crachat d'estaminet*.  
I'm like that odd man Wordsworth knew, to whom  
A primrose was a yellow primrose, one whose doom  
Keeps him forever in the list of dunces,  
Compelled to live on stock responses,  
Making the poor best that I can  
Of dull things . . . peacocks, honey, the Great Wall, Aldebaran,  
Silver weirs, new-cut grass, wave on the beach, hard gem,  
The shapes of horse and woman, Athens, Troy, Jerusalem.

## Evolutionary Hymn

Lead us, Evolution, lead us  
Up the future's endless stair:  
Chop us, change us, prod us, weed us.  
For stagnation is despair.  
C-ropping, guessing, yet progressing,  
Lead us nobody knows where.

Wrong or justice in the present,  
Joy or sorrow, what are they  
While there's always jam to-morrow,  
While we tread the onward way?  
Never knowing where we're going,  
We can never go astray.

To whatever variation  
Our posterity may turn  
Hairy, squashy, or crustacean,  
Bulbous-eyed or square of stern,  
Tusked or toothless, mild or ruthless,  
Towards that unknown god we yearn.

Ask not if it's god or devil,  
Brethren, lest your words imply  
Static norms of good and evil  
(As in Plato) throned on high;  
Such scholastic, inelastic,  
Abstract yardsticks we deny.

F R O M

Poems

## A Confession

I am so coarse, the things the poets see  
Are obstinately invisible to me.  
For twenty years I've stared my level best  
To see if evening—any evening—would suggest  
A patient etherized upon a table;  
In vain. I simply wasn't able.  
To me each evening looked far more  
Like the departure from a silent, yet a crowded, shore  
Of a ship whose freight was everything, leaving behind  
Gracefully, finally, without farewells, marooned mankind.  
Red dawn behind a hedgerow in the east  
Never, for me, resembled in the least  
A chillblain on a cocktail-shaker's nose;  
Waterfalls don't remind me of torn underclothes,  
Nor glaciers of tin-cans. I've never known  
The moon look like a hump-backed crone—  
Rather, a prodigy, even now  
Not naturalized, a riddle glaring from the Cyclops' brow

Far too long have sages vainly  
 Glossed great Nature's simple text;  
 He who runs can read it plainly,  
 'Goodness—what comes next,'  
 By evolving, Life is solving  
 All the questions we perplexed.  
 On then! Value means survival-  
 Value. If our progeny  
 Spreads and spawns and licks each rival,  
 That will prove its deity  
 (Far from pleasant, by our present  
 Standards, though it well may be).

## On the Atomic Bomb

### *Metrical Experiment*

So; you have found an engine  
 Of injury that angels  
 Might dread. The world plunges,  
 Shies, snorts, and curvets like a horse in danger.  
 Then comfort her with fondlings,  
 With kindly word and handling,  
 But do not believe blindly  
 This way or that. Both fears and hopes are swindlers.  
 What's here to dread? For mortals  
 Both hurt and death were certain  
 Already; our light-hearted  
 Hopes from the first sentenced to final thwarting.  
 This marks no huge advance in  
 The dance of Death. His pincers  
 Were grim before with chances  
 Of cold, fire, suffocation, Ogpu, cancer.  
 Nor hope that this last blunder  
 Will end our woes by rending  
 Tellus herself asunder—  
 All gone in one bright flash like dryest tinder.  
 As if your puny gadget  
 Could dodge the terrible logic

Of history! No; the tragic  
 Road will go on, new generations trudge it.  
 Narrow and long it stretches,  
 Wretched for one who marches  
 Eyes front. He never catches  
 A glimpse of the fields each side, the happy orchards.

## Posturing

Because of endless pride  
 Reborn with endless error,  
 Each hour I look aside  
 Upon my secret mirror  
 Trying all postures there  
 To make my image fair.  
 Thou givest grapes, and I,  
 Though starving, turn to see  
 How dark the cool globes lie  
 In the white hand of me,  
 And linger gazing thither  
 Till the live clusters wither.  
 So should I quickly die  
 Narcissus-like of want,  
 But, in the glass, my eye  
 Catches such forms as haunt  
 Beyond nightmare, and make  
 Pride humble for pride's sake.  
 Then and then only turning  
 The stiff neck round, I grow  
 A molten man all burning  
 And look behind and know  
 Who made the glass, whose light makes  
 dark, whose fair  
 Makes foul, my shadowy form reflected  
 there  
 That self-Love, brought to bed of Love  
 may die and bear  
 Her sweet son in despair.



## Joys That Sting

*Oh doe not die, says Donne, for I shall hate  
All women so. How false the sentence rings.  
Women? But in a life made desolate  
It is the joys once shared that have the stings.*

To take the old walks alone, or not at all,  
To order one pint where I ordered two,  
To think of, and then not to make, the small  
Time-honoured joke (senseless to all but you);

To laugh (oh, one'll laugh), to talk upon  
Themes that we talked upon when you were there,  
To make some poor pretence of going on,  
Be kind to one's old friends, and seem to care,

While no one (O God) through the years will say  
The simplest, common word in just your way.

## To Charles Williams

Your death blows a strange bugle call, friend, and all is hard  
To see plainly or record truly. The new light imposes change,  
Re-adjusts all a life-landscape as it thrusts down its probe from the sky,  
To create shadows, to reveal waters, to erect hills and deepen glens.  
The slant alters. I can't see the old contours. It's a larger world  
Than I once thought it. I winced, caught in the bleak air that blows on  
the ridge.

Is it the first sting of the great winter, the world-waning? Or the cold of  
spring?

A hard question and worth talking a whole night on. But with whom?  
Of whom now can I ask guidance? With what friend concerning your  
death

Is it worth while to exchange thoughts unless—oh unless it were you?

## Scazons

Walking to-day by a cottage I shed tears  
When I remembered how once I had walked there  
With my friends who are mortal and dead. Years  
Little had healed the wound that was laid bare.

Out little spear that stabs! I, fool, believed  
I had outgrown the local, unique sting,  
I had transmuted wholly (I was deceived)  
Into Love universal the lov'd thing.

But Thou, Lord, surely knewest thine own plan  
When the angelic indifferences with no bar  
Universally loved, but Thou gav'st man  
The tether and pang of the particular,

Which, like a chemic drop, infinitesimal,  
Plashed into pure water, changing the whole,  
Embodies and embitters and turns all  
Spirit's sweet water into astringent soul,

That we, though small, might quiver with Fire's same  
Substantial form as Thou—not reflect merely  
Like lunar angels back to Thee cold flame.  
Gods are we, Thou hast said; and we pay dearly.

## Sonnet

*Dieu a établi la prière pour communiquer à ses  
creatures la dignité de la causalité.—PASCAL*

The Bible says Sennacherib's campaign was spoiled  
By angels: in Herodotus it says, by mice—  
Innumerable nibbling all one night they toiled  
To eat his bowstrings piecemeal as warm wind eats ice.  
But muscular archangels, I suggest, employed  
Seven little jaws at labour on each slender string,  
And by their aid, weak masters though they be, destroyed  
The smiling-lipped Assyrian, cruel-bearded king.

No stranger than omnipotence should choose to need  
Small helps than great—no stranger if His action lingers

Till men have prayed, and suffers their weak prayers indeed  
 To move as very muscles His delaying fingers,  
 Who, in His longanimity and love for our  
 Small dignities, enfeebles, for a time, His power.

### Stephen to Lazarus

But was I the first martyr, who  
 Gave up no more than life, while you,  
 Already free among the dead,  
 Your rags stripped off, your fetters shed,  
 Surrendered what all other men  
 Irrevocably keep, and when  
 Your battered ship at anchor lay  
 Seemingly safe in the dark bay  
 No ripple stirs, obediently  
 Put out a second time to sea  
 Well knowing that your death (in vain  
 Died once) must all be died again?

### As the Ruin Falls

All this is flashy rhetoric about loving you.  
 I never had a selfless thought since I was born.  
 I am mercenary and self-seeking through and through:  
 I want God, you, all friends, merely to serve my turn.  
 Peace, re-assurance, pleasure, are the goals I seek,  
 I cannot crawl one inch outside my proper skin:  
 I talk of love—a scholar's parrot may talk Greek—  
 But, self-imprisoned, always end where I begin.  
 Only that now you have taught me (but how late) my lack  
 I see the chasm. And everything you are was making  
 My heart into a bridge by which I might get back  
 From exile, and grow man. And now the bridge is breaking.  
 For this I bless you as the ruin falls. The pains  
 You give me are more precious than all other gains.

### The Apologist's Evening Prayer

From all my lame defeats and oh! much more  
 From all the victories that I seemed to score;  
 From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf  
 At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;  
 From all my proofs of Thy divinity,  
 Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me.  
 Thoughts are but coins. Let me not trust, instead  
 Of Thee, their thin-worm image of Thy head.  
 From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of Thee,  
 O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free.  
 Lord of the narrow gate and the needle's eye,  
 Take from me all my trumpety lest I die.

#### REMEMBER

### HELEN JOY DAVIDMAN

D. JULY 1960  
 LOVED WIFE OF  
 C. S. LEWIS

HERE THE WHOLE WORLD (STARS, WATER, AIR,  
 AND FIELD, AND FOREST, AS THEY WERE  
 REFLECTED IN A SINGLE MIND)  
 LIKE CAST OFF CLOTHES WAS LEFT BEHIND  
 IN ASHES, YET WITH HOPE THAT SHE,  
 RE-BORN FROM HOLY POVERTY,  
 IN LENTEN LANDS, HEREAFTER MAY  
 RESUME THEM ON HER EASTER DAY.