

EPILOGUE:
THE R.B., G.K.C. AND
G.B.S. FOREVER
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And when I die, will this dream truly be
Entrained with Shaw and Chesterton and me?
O, glorious Lord, please make it so
That down along eternity we'll row
Atilted headlong, nattering the way
All mouth, no sleep, and endless be our day:
The Chesterton Night Tour, the Shaw Express,
A picknicking of brains in London dress
As one by one we cleave the railroad steams
To circumnavigate my noon and midnight dreams.
First Shaw arrives and hands me biscuit tin
"Grab on, dear child," he cries. "Get in, get in!"

His voice pure Life Force judge and Mankind's Maker.
 G.K. climbs up past Shaw and ticket-taker.
 Now down the line trots Dickens, paced by Twain.
 "Hold on!" cries Mark. And Dickens: "Stop that train!"
 "It's stopped," snorts Shaw, "are your brains packed? Aboard!"
 With this last as commandment from our Lord
 We jostle up to face each other's wits
 As Shaw amidst the mob like statue sits
 And maunders up his tongue to launch the Game
 His merest cough a shot to walk us lame.
 Now Poe arrives in furs, he's dressed for snows
 Cold flurries caper him where e'er he goes,
 Seen distantly his broad pale brow's a moon
 That sinks at daybreak but to rise at noon.
 Charles Dickens's stunned, but Twain cries, "Man alive!"
 G. Shaw and G.K.? blind, as Deaths arrive
 Just I amongst them hear pale Edgar's tune
 His pale heartbeat with tone that echoes loon.
 Now Wilde wafts on, empurpled are his drums
 As something wily-witted this way comes.
 And here stalks Melville, Rudyard Kipling too.
 Whale's Herman's White, Kim's scribe an Indian hue,
 Lord Russell, wily midget, now entrains
 His top hat jumbo-size, to cup his brains
 And challenge Shaw and Chesterton to chats
 While Poe, subsided, scowling, frets their hats
 To mend their politics or bend each mind

While steaming Kipling's Country of the Blind.
 Ah, hark! Their talk is gold and seldom tin
 And boring? Never! God prevent *that* sin!
 Muse hone their tongues to razor-sharpened wits
 So Shaw can rave while proud Lord Russell sits
 And I the modest mouse who locks his lip
 And mutters not a mote along the trip,
 Most gladly hidden—tucked between these brains
 That locomote the night with idea trains,
 Each locked to each and each a brighter car
 And this a nova, that old Halley's star,
 A light-year comet blazed across our sight.
 To teach our railway schools throughout our night.
 Their philosophic crumbs I snatch and eat,
 The hiccoughing of Shaw? my God, a treat!
 While Poe grows quieter the more they storm,
 His snowy moon brow pale, his tongue lukewarm,
 But I am glad for him, for while they range
 Poe's eyes with mine do some wry joke exchange,
 I see the Black Cat hid where Poe's seams split
 His head a Pendulum, his breast a Pit,
 While all about our favorite authors drink
 In mute Poe's eyes I see dire Usher sink,
 Loud Shaw and G.K. take each other to task?
 Says Poe: Amontillado? Here's the Casque,
 Cap on these bells, while I a mortar mix
 To stash these madmen in a cell of bricks.

Thus I in shames, all shambles, keep my peace
 As all these angel souls their wings release.
 The air is battered by these airborne goats
 Who leap and clamber, music in their throats,
 Such sweet enchantments! harken to their gab!
 Their locomotive thunders shake our cab.
 To sound us from the station, what a mix
 Of clangor-dins from these most glorious Six.
 Their conversation showers me with chat
 Till Shaw corks all to point where Truth is at,
 Then Chesterton orates the great I Am
 Nor shuts for tea and tarts (the last with jam).
 And silent midst the rest, now witness Poe.
 He dreams himself found dead in winter snow?
 While Wilde a beggar starves in Paris keep
 And Melville dies on land while critics sleep.
 O damn those soul-survivors, why's it so?
 That wise men then knew not what we now know?
 To tape a Whale but never know its size
 And measure Poe but seldom toss him prize?
 How laugh at Wilde who now must laugh at you?
 I often wonder just what critics do?
 I know they read but wonder if they think?
 I sip on wine while they the other drink,
 But from the selfsame fount, then can it be
 The better part of wisdom lies on me?
 The books I read they shrug and lob away

To bury until resurrection's day.
 What calls these friends from literary tomb?
 One voice, one love, one night, one lonely room
 Where turning pages I with wild desire
 Ran forth to snatch their charred book from the fire?
 O dear Poe, never exit; Mr. Wilde
 Rise up with Dorian to tease this child
 To please this boy again with ghastly tale,
 And Herman, tag along with comrade Whale.
 I would not spurn you forth or turn you out
 Or kill that great White thing with cynic's doubt.
 In baggage car waits Dorian, a canvas ghost,
 While Wilde at tea bites tongue and lets Shaw boast.
 Then Oscar cuts and tosses mot juste
 And laughter rings and leaves him in a gust.
 The authors bark and yip, their faces shine,
 Their vast talk merely beer, while Wilde's is wine.
 At last dear Edgar hems and dares to speak,
 His Usher voice is winter lost and weak,
 His dark heart drums beneath our carriage floor,
 The train's smoke ravens by with: Nevermore.
 We turn to Melville now and seek his Whale,
 What's that? The merest minnow! Drop the sail.
 So say the critics, but does Melville hear?
 He does and shuns the sea and now his bier.
 This midnight train, which rounds the curve ahead,
 Its engine ghostly pale, a loom of dread,

Then all's not lost, for whether land or sea,
 Old Moby tracks the chase and summons me.
 We doubt all this but crowd the pane to spy
 That locomoting Whiteness, hear its cry?
 With churned Saint Elmo's fires, sweet Christ, what sound!
 The sea like God sounds near, we all are drowned.
 As down the nightfall path we raving go,
 Old Moby dragging us, one train of woe.
 "O, bosh!" says Shaw, and sits, to jolt us back,
 "That's Industry's Revolt upon the track!"
 Much better that than Beast. We sit to eat,
 Take tea, a biscuit, bun, or brioche-sweet.
 While Kipling curries up remembrance when
 His Kim drummed out in dust then back again,
 And Kaa was coveted as monarch snake,
 And Mowgli howled with wolves that shrilled to shake.
 The moon, and pace our train, while our hearts sing:
 Aye! Kipling's our Man Who Would Be King!
 Then all too soon, the sun burns up at dawn,
 No time to cork our sleep or share a yawn,
 It's over, for now look, around the bend,
 Our final stop! the station where books end.
 And authors step and leave and all's good-bye,
 I start to think it so and start to cry.
 With wicker rustlings now the gods arise,
 Their glory burst my chest and cracks my eyes.
 The train with muffled heartbeat chuffs to cease,

At Land's End Lost Time Station, hear the peace,
 Where just the other breath our life was words,
 Now trees are filled with literature of birds.
 Shaw jumps down first, with Chesterton close by
 And Kipling wipes the tear winks from my eye.
 There, funeral of one, comes Mr. Poe
 With Melville dressed in white, his face all snow.
 Poe grips my hand in silence, does not say
 "Farewell" or "Nevermore" but glides away.
 While Oscar last of all, now inside sits
 To pack and then repack his case of wits,
 "This is a special time," he says, "let's try
 To say farewells as if we really meant good-bye."
 My chin is chuckled by Twain, who like the sun
 All laughing, buffs my cheek, "God bless you, son."
 And there they stroll along the station strand,
 With Melville slow and 'lorn and lost on land.
 What is this place? a bookshop by the sea?
 O, yes! How grand! That fires a joy in me!
 They are not lost or dead, for here, next day,
 Some other child will travel them away,
 On night train journeyings that only slow
 At towns where other authors thrive and go
 And bark all night and all the glad things know.
 Why is this so? Because I say it's so.
 My friends are gone, I stand a moment more,
 To see their footprints sift along the shore,

I wave at shadows, climb aboard my train.
I weep because their likes won't come again.
But this sure thing I know by sounding sea:
Their deaths diminish, words replenish me.
For traveling down the shore in lonely car,
I open wide their books and there they are!