

**FLEET STREET, AND
OTHER POEMS**

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Fleet street, and other poems by John Davidson

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JOHN DAVIDSON

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and other poems

By

JOHN DAVIDSON



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1909

THE time has come to make an end. There are several motives. I find my pension is not enough; I have therefore still to turn aside and attempt things for which people will pay. My health also counts. Asthma and other annoyances I have tolerated for years; but I cannot put up with cancer.

I thought this might be my last book, and intended five poems, "Cain," "Judas," "Cæsar Borgia," "Calvin," and "Cromwell" under the general title, "When God Meant God," to be the principal contents. "Cain" is the only one of these poems which I have written. I should have concluded the volume with a second Testament in my own person, insisting that men should no longer degrade themselves under such appellations as Christian, Mohammedan, Agnostic, Monist, etc. Men are the Universe become conscious: the simplest man should consider himself too great to be called after any name.

J. D.

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FLEET STREET

WISPS and rags of cloud in a withered sky,
A strip of pallid azure, at either end,
Above the Ludgate obelisk, above
The Temple griffin, widening with the width
Below, and parallel with the street that counts
Seven hundred paces of tessellated road
From Ludgate Circus west to Chancery Lane:
By concrete pavement flanked and precipice
Of windowed fronts on this side and on that,
A thoroughfare of everything that hastes,
The sullen tavern-loafers notwithstanding
And hawkers in the channel hunger-bit.

Interfluent night and day the tides of trade,
Labour and pleasure, law and crime, are sucked
From every urban quarter: through this strait
All business London pours. Amidst the boom
And thud of wheel and hoof the myriad feet
Are silent save to him who stands a while
And hearkens till his passive ear, attuned
To new discernment like an erudite
Musician's, which can follow note by note
The part of any player even in the din

And thrashing fury of the noisiest close
Orchestral, hears chromatic footsteps throb
And tense susurrant speech of multitudes
That stride in pairs discussing ways and means,
Or reason with themselves, in single file
Advancing hardily on ruinous
Events; and should he listen long there comes
A second-hearing like the second-sight
Diviners knew, or as the runner gains
His second-breath; then phantom footsteps fall,
And muffled voices travel out of time:
Alsations pass and Templars; stareabouts
For the new motion of Nineveh; morose
Or jolly tipplers at the Bolt-in-Tun,
The Devil Tavern; Johnson's heavy tread
And rolling laughter; Drayton trampling out
The thunder of Agincourt as up and down
He paces by St. Dunstan's; Chaucer, wroth,
Beating the friar that traduced the State;
And more remote, from centuries unknown,
Rumour of battle, noises of the swamp,
The gride of glacial rock, the rush of wings,
The roar of beasts that breathed a fiery air
Where fog envelops now electric light,
The music of the spheres, the humming speed
Centrifugal of molten planets loosed
From pregnant suns to find their orbits out,
The whirling spindles of the nebulae,