

Spencer W. Kimball and Poetry

Spencer W. Kimball had great respect for the power of words and felt complimented when people characterized some of his sermons as poetic. Occasionally he tried his hand at poetry, but most of it was strictly for private consumption. In his study he kept a looseleaf notebook containing poems he had written. His own uncertainty about the merit of his poems is suggested by the label "Verse or Worse" affixed to the notebook and by this introductory quatrain:

Sometimes I muse and weep a tear
And write another verse.
In spite of all the pains I take
Each gets a little worse.

Despite the humorously apologetic tone of these lines, it is apparent that he took poetry seriously as a way of dealing with the significant emotional events in his life. In the notebook there is a scrap of paper on which he jotted, "Write verses about Ma's Death, Eddie [his son who contracted polio], My Call, and Surgery."

A man of action with little time for the shaping of poetry, Spencer W. Kimball seldom finished a poem in the sense of refining it for publication, and only a few pieces of his verse were published during his lifetime, usually because they were included in talks he gave. Most of his poetic work was of no particular consequence, just homely verses about family or things scratched out during funerals. A few poems have more substance, however, and we include them here, both for their literary merit and for the additional insight they give into his character.¹

¹A poem by Spencer W. Kimball about the devastation in postwar Berlin appears in *Brigham Young University Studies* 25 (Winter 1985): 54.

When I Look Back

To Camilla

When I look back across our mingled years,
I know it is not just the joys we shared
That made our lives one pattern, but the tears
We shed together, and the rough, wild seas we fared.
Through all the disappointments we have faced,
Through this world's faults and failures, we have come
To heights of understanding that are based
More on the sorrows than the joys of home.

Young love is beautiful to contemplate
But old love is the finished tapestry
Stretched out from oaken floors to heaven's gate.
We wove on earth for all eternity
With threads made stronger by the steady beat
Of hearts that suffered but knew no defeat.

—Spencer W. Kimball

Dachau

In 1955 Spencer W. Kimball visited Dachau, a Nazi death camp. He recorded in his journal:

From Munich we drove off the road a little to the famous and infamous Dachau, where some of the most horrible and bloodcurdling atrocities of the Second World War were committed. . . . The place was morbid and distressing. We walked away silently as we walked around it. Was there anything could be said? . . . The little city of Dachau, perhaps three or four miles away was enjoying the holiday which Germany is enjoying today and seemed to be unworried about the death chambers and death ovens so near. They have gotten used to it, I suppose. I should not like to live in a town by the name of Dachau.

Later, still brooding over the experience, he wrote his feelings:

We felt the tomb-like silence of Dachau,
walked speechless through the empty four-wall gas chambers—
cold walls scribbled on by numerous visitor relatives of the lost dead.
And as we filed breathlessly past the open ovens and the incinerator tools,
we felt the clammy clutching of the ghosts of death.

The mounds of human ashes brought a tingle to the spine.
The rifle range where many fell successively in line
and hangman's spot caused shivers and gave us a painful start.
The blood ditch made us gasp with growing horror at the heart.
The metal statue, figure of the symbol victim there,
with form so gaunt and skin so taut and disappearing hair—
his eyes so deep and hollow and his clothes so loosely hung,
emaciated sufferer, just skin on bones is strung.
It seemed we died there also, as expressionless we walked
among the ghosts of multitudes whom heartless death had locked.
The silenced cries of tortured dead kept ringing in our ears,
and fancied haunting sighs and moans kept whispering through
the tears.

Oh, Father, please this scene erase, Thou Holy One so kind.
Let us return to pleasant thoughts; remove this from our mind.
Forgive the fiends who terror wrought, in spite of whom souls live.
If they sensed not the thing they did, dear Lord, can you forgive?

—Spencer W. Kimball

His Work All Done?

His work all done? Not so, my friends, for it is scarce begun.
You think his dear sweet voice is ever stilled? Not so! Know ye
that testimonies truly borne by conscientious bearers
do not fall unheeded, unremembered, lost for aye.
But faithful angels write down each one's every word, a record
for all time—eternity. Rejoice at this assurance.
It is sure forgiveness follows testimony borne
and nothing's lost that fits into the great eternal Plan.

His work all done? Not so, my friends, for it is scarce begun.
In this life's work we make a bare beginning. There's no end.
How glorious the truth that our eternities are built
upon foundations firmly set in these our mortal days.

—Spencer W. Kimball

I'm Home Again

I'm home again!
And when I came my dear friends smiled and waved their hands
In welcoming salute.

I am home again!
But many an old friend's face is missing from the crowd.
A scythe has reaped the grain.

Thank God I'm home!
And may it be his will that I
Shall come again
To this, a land beneath
The desert sun with beauty rare and peace and friends
That all do make it home.

—Spencer W. Kimball

As We Came

One departs and leaves the other.
They would rather go together
Through the veil,
But the plan of God our Father
Comprehends that we should rather
In travail
Pass into the world of spirits
One by one as we came here
Into this vale.

—Spencer W. Kimball