

The Chimney Sweeper

by
William Blake

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! "
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved so I said
" Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, and that very night,
as Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned and Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;
and the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father, and never want joy.

and so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

Testimony of Gus Blake, Age 7 Chimney Sweep

I became a chimney sweep when I was 5 when I was sold to a master sweep by my parents. I was taught how to clean the chimneys of soot by my older brother when I stood on his shoulders. At first I suffered many cuts and bruises on my knees, elbows and thighs but after several months my skin became hardened enough to withstand such wounds. My best friend, Bill, also worked as climbing boy or chimney sweep. When he was afraid to climb a chimney, his master would often encourage him with beatings, knife pricks on his bare soles or would light a fire under him. Many times I got lost when I climbed through the narrow winding passages of chimneys in the large houses. Since there was nowhere to wash I had to sleep with the soot on my hands and face and in the same clothes I had worn in the chimneys.



Death Certificate

NAME: *Gus Blake*
DATE OF BIRTH: *May 14, 1814*
DATE OF DEATH: *September 22, 1825*
OCCUPATION: *Chimney sweep*
AGE: *11 years of age*

CAUSE OF DEATH: *Chronic smoke inhalation led to pneumonia which led to respiratory failure.*

DESCRIPTION OF BODY: *The face, hands and legs were covered with black soot. The skin was unusually hard and the bottoms of the feet displayed numerous scars. The mouth and lungs were also coated with soot.*

Doctor Paul Sharples, M.D.

Dr. P. Sharples

Signature

on this day, month, year

LONDON TIMES

DECEMBER 13, 1830 ADVERTISEMENT

**CHIMNEY SWEEPS FOR HIRE!
1 pence per chimney!**

WANTED!

BOY OF SMALL SIZE; AGE 6 UP
TO CLEAN TUNNEL OR CHIM-
NEY; MUST CARRY HIS BOYS
FROM ROOM TO ROOM TO PRE-
VENT STAINING OR MARKING
ANY ROOM FLOOR WITH THEIR
FEET.

reply to:
WILLIAM BURGES
MASTER CHIMNEY SWEEP
21 PICCADILLY STREET
LONDON



Chimney Sweeps Act of 1834

- 1. Banned the apprenticing of chimney sweeps under ten years of age.*

Chimney Sweeps Act of 1840

- 1. Raised the apprenticing age of chimney sweeps to 21 years of age.*

*Testimony at the 1831 Inquiry
of Joseph Heber*

*I work at the textile factory from 5 am to 8 pm
with a half an hour at midday for a meal.*

*Joseph Heber
17 year old boy*

Signature Joseph Heber