

The Tower

by
Owen Barfield

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Editors

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a poem
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THE TOWER

I

Along a footway through a dreaming field
A boy went loitering slowly. Since midday
The golden afternoon had hung about him,
Like a great, sunlit dewdrop gathering
To fall from a leaf's point; till all that weight
Dazzled and lulled his mind; and a faint smell,
Confused, of hawthorn and of little flowers
Drowsing about the hedgerow, clothed his body
And drew a warm veil over all his thought,
With on the veil traced half obliterate 10
The pattern of some far forgotten day
In childhood, when the smell, unmarked, had been
Caught in his nostrils and deep in his breast
Imprinted for all lifetime secretly.
Therefrom his mind, smooth traveller, stole away,
Rocking the cradle of old memories
And stooping softly over them with low
And private croonings, while it wandered up
The slowly narrowing path of years that stretched
Back to the baby mists.
He scarcely knew 20
When he had ceased to move and lain himself

In the long, warm, unwavering grasses down
For now already he had reached those mists
And entered, groping, there, where loomed no ghost
To be remembered, saying: 'This was I' –
No self at all, but only a loose bundle
Of senses five, absorbing open-eyed
And open-mouthed, dim tidings of a world:
Back to the mists: deeper: his peering mind
Felt the quick touch of flitting shapes, but saw
No light at all: deeper: and all was still.

30

Wherefore lost memory turned, to seek some light,
Back down the years. Gleamed suddenly the sharp
Glimpse of a moment, when from game to game
Hurrying through an empty room one night
Breathless and eager-eyed with romping joy,
It chanced that he had looked, scarce knowing yet
What thing a mirror was, into a mirror
And seen a face, his own, give back to him
A stranger's smile first, then a stranger's frown,
And seen an eye, whose depths he could not plumb,
A stranger's eye, which drew his steady gaze;
Then, as he looked, grew larger and more strange,
Till he saw nothing else, but was alone
Drowned in its ocean silence: long he stood
With the first infant stammerings of his mind
Trying: 'myself' – but could not understand.

40

Now this gleam died, and larger diffused lights
Shone through the gloaming of his memory
With the faint colours of whole months, whole years –
Textures of time, whose many-coloured threads,
Each hour and minute, faded long ago

50

Into one hue – cast garments of the soul
That tell her growth.

 Surprised, he found his lips
Had formed themselves to utter the pet name
A nurse had made for him: then all at once
An old, mysterious smell, a sickroom, and
The paper on its wall, and the long cracks
Across the ceiling, how they ran to meet,
Parted, and met again, changing and sliding 60
Into each other there, above young eyes
Bright with some fever and a-swim with dreams.

 Now a remembered midnight – one of many –
As once again from short oblivion he
Starts into tortured wakefulness, aware
Of solitude and the vast emptiness
Of night; and peering forward rigidly,
Half-raised in bed, stares with wide eyes into
The leering silence, damped with gradual sweat
At watery shapes, the film of his own eyes, 70
That float before them monstrously. Alone
He lives the night, alone, a tiny fly
Caught in the world – young spirit's insect-wings
Buzzing with terror in the pitiless web
Of elemental nothing.

 But there came,
Blotting all these, a simple melody
So old that it was sad; and in his heart
The quaint remembered cadences of words,
Little blunt verses, musical endings
Of fairy chapters tolled again, and brought 80
Their stories back to him, with all that time

When he had lived among them, half confused
What things were true or false, and what were dreams –
Beautiful images, lingering like rich arras
That hangs on modern walls in tatters, still
Fresh with the clear childhood of a race:
And one (the brightest coloured): how two children
Were out in a wide city, when the snow,
Already fallen, made the dark night blench
And, falling still, caressed them with shy touches, 90
Until they, wandering onward hopelessly,
Came to a Lion figured huge in stone
And entered magically a carved throat
Found red and warm inside, and soft with life –
Then, by mysterious inward climbings, were
High on the narrow plinth that topped the column
Above their Lion, and among chill stars
Sailing the sky in a perilous barque of stone
Steered by a statue. . . But the years had lent
Interior meaning to those baby pictures, 100
The white snow, the red gorge, the chiselled stone,
And the straight column tapering in the dark.

And there were family days – old shouting days
Of echoes through the house, and of a ring
Of small, bright evening faces round the lamp,
With father young, with mother young and ready,
Before the crinkled weariness of work
Sharpened her face and tired her laughter out –
Long, secure days. . . Yet even at this time
Often in some chance loneliness it came, 110
The sudden moment of stark desolation,
The choking misery, the lorn dismay,

When life slid and the future, stoutly nailed
To hopes of little joys, tugged suddenly
And fell, discovering darkness and a wind
That blew about him in a wilderness
Of thought, sole, groping for a boundary. . .
Till, at last, for relief, a voice would sound
From the heart's well of anguish faltering up,
A final voice, that firmly said 'There are 120
'Mother and home': and slowly, like a limb,
Through which a warm beam flung from crimson coals
Spreads radiant fingers – he would be comforted.

Save for black gulfs like these, the unmusical days
Sped levelly along on happiness,
Drab happiness, not warm with ecstasies,
Dead happiness always, and the safe love
Of many creatures ever at his side,
Till love's own stream, forgot, flowed underneath
The surface of his heart – not beautiful 130
With ripple and rocky laughter in the light,
But asleep – and asleep – when, at a sign,
Stripped of its callous crust of long school years,
The soul stood naked, splendidly abashed,
Trembling beneath spell-binding fragrances
That danced about girl-faces. He had walked,
Dreaming of kisses, amid household mirth—
Alone again, alone among all, friends,
As pale new wraiths of beauty, curling up
Around his loves – shy tendrils choked with shame – 140
Pitted their new-born feebleness against
Habitual laughter, like rough, kindly hands
Smearing the fragile bloom from lovely things,

Habitual laughter, till imagination,
Barred within doors, incestuously created
For its own use its own desirous dreams.

The restlessness was on him now; he rose,
And went, stirring the breathless afternoon
In fumes about him, like a man who dives
And breaks the surface of a warm, rich pool.

150

II

When men are thrown together, cut apart
From women's faces and fine influence,
Their souls rush off, like ants, on different paths;
Some grow more active, some more obstinate,
Some scarcely can keep back the mawkish tears,
And some pop out bright heads from cynic tubs
And nod to the four quarters with a wink.
Some – with a gesture – woo dear beastliness,
Thinking that way to jettison their dreams,
Then, suffering shipwreck, shout that they alone
Are seeing the world very clearly, swimming
Naked the waters of cold Truth, not floating
Upon the surface in a gondola
Of blurred sensation and child-memories
Grown monstrous, and queer patterns in the skull
Wriggled by the dark worms of suppressed lust. . .
Poor grey philosophers, and cannot see
Themselves are dream and all their theories!

10

But many drown like lead without a cry.

Among such fellows the bewildered boy 20
Grew more bewildered, neither understanding
Himself nor them; as dimly, dimly and slowly,
He noticed and remembered little things.
Big Bannister, the soft-faced Irishman,
Who wrenched and wrenched, and felt himself a man
By talking *sotto voce* with big eyes
About his women and their secret clothes,
Has slid into the room; big Bannister,
Who was in Connaught in a little hut,
Growing there eighteen years among the pigs, 30
Till Dublin swallowed him and spewed him out
Into a London barber's shop. He pads
Into the hut, sits, fixes his soft eyes
Upon the reading boy. They are alone.
And now he pours out the last episode,
Purring with female, strutting in the puddle
Of his great naughtiness, punctuating
Each pause with laughter that is oh so sly,
And looking to the hearer for applause
Or bashful deference. Tonight the boy 40
Chances to be too tired to play up,
Put on his grin, and make the sound that oils
The jarring wheels of forced companionship.
He does not laugh, he does not look away,
Or down, or blush; but, like one half-asleep,
Answers very gravely with the truth
Each sidelong question; then he quietly
Asks him a question, and big Bannister
Louder and faster and more greasily
Goes talking on and will not answer it 50

And smirks: the boy with sleep's own devilry
Asks it again, and others, takes him up
At every comma: Bannister blasphemes,
Shouts, threatens, rises snarling from his chair,
Then weeps, and pours his uninvited lees
Of tenderness out into the boy's ear
All tingling – mother and the Irish girl.

Bannister shunned him after: when they met,
A shell came over the gentle of his eyes,
A shell of arrogance. He went on laughing 60
Deliberately, oilily, slyly;
But the boy, listening, heard in it now
The rumbling undersong. He now in eyes
Of every man saw more than he could tell
Even to himself; in pauses of their talking
To him across the stillness the last laugh
Rang like the screech of something in a cage.
Often the misty argument ran high,
Heart stumbling after heart, the while men spoke
Out of their knowledge and their pain the truth; 70
Till slowly self and most most private self
Came creeping nearer for companionship
And nearer – when one, suddenly afraid,
Skittered away behind a quick guffaw
And hid, and peeped, and crept again. Which he
Contemplating for ever was a child
Pitchiting past the hedgerows in a train,
Drowsily watching the wires – how they soar
Higher and higher – will they go up now
Above the small square window, into the sky? 80
Higher and higher and higher – flashes a pole

Past the window, jerking them down down
Down down, and soon they are creeping again
Higher and higher, and will they go up now
Above the small square window, up to the sky?
Till he awakens and drops back again,
Filling his mind with small things, like a sail
That bulges with the Trade-wind and flees on
Whirled like a leaf over the empty sea
Along with the empty sky, and comes to port, 90
Where it is furled and sewn into a bag
For housewife's brickabrack. He was like that,
He was a working, playing, grumbling man,
A sleeper through the night, a lover of laughter,
Sweet comfortable laughter that transforms
Demons to bogeys and long grief to folly.
And so for many months he travelled on,
And so he might have travelled to the grave.

III.

The curving high-street of the little town
Went washed in empty brilliance, up the hill,
Past the cathedral; the clear cobble-stones
Threw each a little shadow-pool; the rails,
Rivers of moonlit metal, gleamed away
Silent, where all day long the trams had clacked.
Here at a corner the old sleeping pile
From the light's bright field sickled a sharp swathe
Across the street and up the mouldering wall,
Where yawned an archway leading to the Close. 10

Behind it shone under the open sky
Chimneys and spires, together ranged in peace.
Lonely among these floated and stood still,
Fairy beneath the moon, an old stone tower
Framed in the archway; and dead silence lay
Like silk upon the street, and noiseless rows
Of grey mysterious lack-lustre blinds
Hid rows of sleepers dreaming different dreams.
Silence was rustled by the far faint ring
Of metal upon stone, the louder beat 20
Of feet approaching, the loud tramp, tramp, tramp
Of feet – the feet hesitated and stopped.
Silence was broken by cathedral clock
Chiming a quarter and chiming another quarter.
And the feet moved and the sound died away.

But there between those chimings of the bells,
Somewhere in the quietness of that street,
Where it flowed most adream, the stream of Thought
Bubbled, and beauty suddenly built her bridge,
Her rainbow archway cantilevered upon 30
Gossamer bastions. . . A day in fields,
Clear with whole sunlit reverie, and tonight
Sprang together behind a soldier's face.
And the feet moved and the sound died away.

IV

Sharp as a tennis-ball from a hard court,
The light rebounded from the cambered stones.
The weighted summer air was dark with noon.

The olive foliages of separate trees
Hung still beneath the sky. From his machine
An airman spied that road – on it a van
Ran like a small ball rolling down a groove,
Hurrying westward. It was dusk inside,
And there was smell of petrol and burnt oil
In the nostrils of a dozing soldier 10
Exempt from pain and terror – not from woe.
The shattered limb had ceased to ache – not yet
The shattered spirit. Eddying memories
Encompassed and bewildered him; he lived
Over and over again so carefully
Through every chapter of the previous day,
Patiently recapitulating all
The secret ruses of trapped will, up to
The hideous moment when it failed: – ‘If I
Can bring those threads together, disentangled, 20
Up to hell’s gate in memory,
I shall be able to carry them through:’ when lo!
The bubble of this fatuous thought exploded,
Which his half-fevered brain at once began
To blow again, until the blinding truth
Shouted that action is irrevocable.

He shifted on the stretcher, to shake off
The misery – remembering how, by jerking
The glass bits of a toy kaleidoscope,
The pattern changes – and the pattern changed: 30
Individual memories stood out
Atrocious. The Familiars of his bed,
Came gibbering back in loving longways dance
From the dark cupboard where they would not stay:

The long-drawn Shriek of agony, the Knife
 Twisting in entrails slowly, the pushed Point
 Pressing and pressing home among soft veins
 Nearer the windpipe, glimpse of upturned Face
 Gasping and squirming in such agony
 Beneath the stamping boot, the beastlike Mouth 40
 Shapeless with malice and sobbing with hate
 At me – until the shape of the mouth grows
 And it is nearer, and the car itself
 And the whole world are in it: Oh, the darkness –
 Recognized darkness – rushing to his soul
 Blotting all hope and being, and the wind
 That blows about him in the wilderness
 Alone and groping for a boundary – air
 Chiller than breath of spectres – oh, the darkness
 Rolled, like a stone, across his spirit's tomb. 50

Then all at once a spasm of bodily pain
 Aroused him, as the ambulance down jolted
 Into a hole and out again: fled thought
 Leaving thick fumes; and vaguely now he gazed
 Through the back curtains shaken to a slit
 Upon wide sunny fields, the burnished road
 Dropping away behind him like a cable
 Put by a travelling drum. The air was clear;
 No cloud was in that sky; and yet earth seemed
 Dark. As on some October afternoon 60
 Black beams shoot down from where the sun must be,
 Threatening instead of brightening the earth,
 So from within his clear and painless head
 A beam of darkness seemed to radiate
 Personal, yet eclipsing actual day.

Into his picture slid a tiny hamlet
With peasant-women stooping over beans
Natural, industrious, immemorial, and
A little child came running to the gate
To gape after the car. He scarce had time 70
To feel how this flit glimpse of fellow-creatures
Was dissolving despair, when they turned
Sharp to the right in the middle of the village,
And the slit shewed him, far on the sky-line,
Square and un-English, squat and solid, and yet
Beautiful with its northern symmetry,
And known already from large picture hanging
Coloured in local shop – there gazed upon
With sense of dim significance – a tower:
Quick witchery! How soon the dreamlight spread 80
Over his world, that dusk interior
Odorous, and those thronging memories.
Noon entered his lax limbs. His blood flowed tingling
As betwixt sleep and waking. Eyes seemed looking
Out over leagues and leagues of wasted acreage
Barren as a sharp landscape of the moon,
Save where earth rose in split and blasted trunks,
Which, staggering beneath forgotten agonies,
Suffered their mineral passion – and this tower
Sullenly pointing to a sullen sky. 90
Oh, desolation of the Spirit of Man!

Yet – even as he cowered – back it sped
(Which he had once, detached for the first time
From home and love, and mad with loneliness,
Walking the streets of a strange city, known)
Vast, electrical cloud of exultation,

Bursting of childish bonds, huge levity
 And condescending power of a Djinn
 Uncorked from the small flagon of himself
 And towering like a beanstalk, like a cloud 100
 Spreading all over heaven – *I come!* – Oh, joy!
 Oh, soaring liberty! The very dead
 Sang carols in his ears, as though their life's
 Sweet stem had been cut off to grant him life,
 Life that should tear new meaning from itself,
 Life that would in no manner be denied,
 Till it had walked about the stars
 And made a girdle of the Galaxy. . .
 "Till he has bumped his head against the bars
 And played the noodle in the gallery!" 110
 He nodded, jerking vanity out of dreams,
 And sank stonelike into the freezy waters
 Of self-contempt. 'Poor wish-fulfilling cog!
 Because it has no courage, must it dream
 Always of courage, and because no strength,
 Must its contemptible imagination
 Play Samson in the nursery? Is it not,
 Is it not enough the creature is not fit
 To eat from the same plate. . . but it must use
 Armies for inspiration – it must strut 120
 Starched up before its mirror, on the staff
 Of the Creator? Fuss, fuss, little flea,
 And think thou art the pulse of the machine!'

Bodily weariness obscured the thread
 Of serious argument, but not that sense
 Of contradictions unresolved, torn halves,
 Which, if he could but strongly re-unite,

Would take the strain and leave him free for sleep.
Yet ere he slept indeed, that journey done,
He was betwixt white sheets, lazily turning 130
The pages of bright, stupid magazines,
And not a vestige in his muddy soul
Either of vanity or aspiration.

V

Summer and health returned: remembered war
Was not yet deep enough sunk in his being
To canker every dream: and dreams came
Hard on each others' heels. What suffering
They brought was this – their very numerousness,
The fear of dropping each ere it could form
Tangible memories – and the wild impatience.
Oh, that impatience, ruin of youth's joy!
All things are mapped for joy. Within his ear
Nature and poesy begin to chant 10
Their danceable duet. Fresh ears, fresh eyes
Are built into his soul by piercing words
Of Keats or Shelley – all that marvelous Wave
That burst the crust of Reason; now does Fancy
Behold a Nature never dreamed. Oh Boy,
It is enough – and more: drink, oh drink deep!
Be tranquil as old age even at this moment
While sensitive as youth. Thou fool, and blind,
It may not be. The everlasting hunger
For growth, for personal rapture, for some joy 20
To which these hints are but the scraping prelude,

Will not be quiet. Life drives onward fast.
Scarce eighteen times shall Earth have twirled her moon
Ere he has launched on that long agony
Of gradual starvation in the dark
That death which must inform him pang by pang
How these faint noises were the actual tune.

And *are* they faint? Now, while thy freedom holds,
While love still glimmers low on the horizon
Like some rose-tinted mountain, to whose base 30
Holiday-makers tramp unhurrying
With well-filled knapsacks – even now, not once
But many times, the secret-breathing world
Whispers to thee, yet whispers with a voice
Which memory shall warehouse as a shout:
Mornings in later summer – the cold air
Crudging the heart beneath the risen sun
Flashing over a carpet of thick dew
Which loads meticulously clear each thread
Of perilous cobwebs; level evenings 40
Filling the air with spirit of gold,
Till time itself is crystallized, and hangs
Like a pure grain washed from Pactolus' bed.
Were these *faint* signals? Winking jack-o-lanterns
Not to be trusted? Ay, for now this man
Began to be not one sole soul but two.
He could no longer trace the ligature
That ties an evening to a morning mood.
Often at night, before his hearth, reading,
Alone, or struggling to compose the cauldron 50
Of formless impulses that burst to dreams
Fast as each bubbled to the surface – often

At night, if by the end he had succeeded
In taming down his mind to be receptive,
Wide-eyed with bodily fatigue, he grew
Aware as of a faintly singing cloud
Enveloping his head: and, wearily
Closing his volume, would feel in his blood
The pressure of unwritten poetry
Knocking: “I can all things!” No imagery 60
Formed in his mind, no thoughts; and yet it seemed
His essence and the essence of the world
Flowed, and that if he could maintain the mood
Long enough time, the brain must of itself
Construct new metaphors, and move the world
To tears and wonder with its terrible art.

But then – when he awoke after ten hours
Of deathlike sleep – shaking it off, he smiled
At all those reveries, and thought those dreams
Worms spiring through a lump of lifeless clay 70
Until the stuff seems living. He who laughed
At fatuous affectation, he who knew
That fire burns or seven and two are nine –
This was the real “I”: that other, the dreamer,
Was the poor lunatic court poet, kept
To while away a Prince’s tedious hours
By tickling his senses with neat wit
And flattering up his immortality.

Spiritual visions? Bodily states of strain,
Reverberations, delicate overtones 80
Of the quivering catgut of desire!

As once the live prey of the Inquisition
Was fitted struggling into a harsh robe,

A barrel of steel wedges, which impinged
And hour by hour blotted out bright life,
So had the bristle of mechanic thought,
Entering by tiny punctures unperceived,
Closed on his consciousness through gradual years,
Till now the spikes, nigh meeting, left no space
For flesh and blood. He was beside himself. 90

His mind bowed down to emptiness. Each cracked
And leaky syllogism carried him
Easily over great gulfs of discourse,
Give only that the slick conclusion mocked
His heart's immediate knowledge. The most true,
Most intimate experiences were cast
For self-deceptions exorcising fear.
So one night, waking swiftly, he lay gazing
Upon the furniture of his bedroom
Lit up for company, and two bright eyes 100
Fastened them glittering upon one chair
Senseless and standing still in the same place
Under the lamp – until its stony look
Bruised and bewildered him, and in his brain
It seemed a loud voice prophesied, uttering: – *Dead!*

These isolated moments of strange life,
These alternating moods, seemed to detach
Himself even from himself, so that he feared
Actual madness. For, at other times,
Awaking in the night to contemplate 110
Majestic constellations through the pane,
He seemed a prisoner gazing through the eyes
Of someone else's body, a rough ape's
Or a dead man's, despairing, choking – struggling

With claustrophobia – bursting with fierce life.

Yet of all this none knew; for in the day
From those deep roots of humour in his blood
Sprang up a foliage of shame, which made
His own experience seem affectation,
Byronic, not to be believed, until 120

He doubted his own memory. Meanwhile
A load accumulated on his heart
Secretly, unacknowledged, felt one moment,
Forgot the next; till sometimes it broke through,
Transmuted to pure tenderness, in fumes,
Dense fumes astonishing, which hung around
Whimsical accidental thoughts and things;
And, in especial, round one slender tower,
Whose grace had moved so many loving hearts,
Clustered like a rich swarm of bees. He waited 130

Its coming into view around some corner
With eagerness each time he walked. He stood
Often exactly at its base and gazed
Up, or was greatly comforted to feel
It soaring up out of him like an angel
Loving and overshadowing and awaiting.
And he would watch the way it took the light
Of morning or of evening, rain or dry,
Autumn and Spring, reflecting or absorbing,
Now blue, now grey, now calm and sunny gold, 140
As some young lover notes with different thrills
His mistress's various drapery and her moods.

But when this very image sprang into
Expectant fancy, quickly the old tower
Looked all awry and stockish – a mere peg

For sentimental ravings – and the calm
That brooded on his spirit was churned up
To personal hunger and anxiety.

VI

See how the day grows on the morning earth,
How forms and masses vague coagulate
Of darker within darkness – the first hope
Of light, while space must still be thought, not seen:
Slowly the glimmering Eastern sky inserts
The watcher in his visible universe
With right or left, North, South, until more light
Discovers cloud and rock and blade of grass
Distinct, and gives, like love, to everything
Colour and self. Now one part of the heavens 10
Is all a lake, and still it is unknown
Betwixt which pair of shrubs He will appear,
And yon cloud-mirror, floating high, glows pink
And yonder after, and the morning creeps
Forward on leaden feet – till, suddenly –
Your eyes! – oh, *one* part of the bright lake blazes
To shooting scarlet, it stirs like a rose
Opening before the watcher's eyes, who knows,
Nor waits a heartbeat ere that burning rim
Shouts over the sharp shoulder of the earth; 20
And his blood leaps with inarticulate sense
Of life, of life to come: – yet, in one hour
The little eye of day is up, hard, small,
Screwed in the sky for all to see – no more

Singing Osirean secrets to the heart,
Which all day strives wistfully to feed
On the faint glorious memory of His birth.

She sits – she sits beside him – hush! – speak not! –

Think not! – this is the sunrise of a life:
Through but this afternoon it shall be bliss 30

Only to be in the same room – he swims
In skies of liquid light – each wee impression
Of world through window, music, happy colour
His thundering heart informs with joyous God;
And all the memories of all hours of peace,
Magic of women’s faces, all sweet calms
Rained by a glint of kindness, from their tombs

Deep in the wormy vaults of memory
Arise, they sing, they dance, until Desire
Shakes his great shoulders and sighs and slumbers – only 40
Murmuring on in dreams: – ‘Let Time stand still!’

And all the while the raving lover listens
To his own fencing voice, with trivial pun,
Jest, quip, opinion, guarding well the secret,
And all the while his blood throbs with a sense
Of an unspeakable fullness yet to come,
Of standing on the threshold of new life
Never yet dreamed – and he is on the threshold,
Threshold of Heaven on earth – but falling out,
Not climbing in. From now seek earth on earth, 50

Heaven in Heaven – wisdom which men learn
Only by pain and death, the cruel death
Of personal passion, which, like some low creature
Whose hideous vitality kicks in spasms
After the back is broken, shall long years

After thou deem'st it crushed and starved to death,
Raise up its beauteous head and bite the soul
With awful desolations, bitter thoughts
Of wasted life and of no happiness.

VII

As one that swiftly fades into the 'O'
Of a dark tunnel's mouth, he vanishes.
Oh, let him! Though a curious pen had power,
What use to follow him through that blind walk
Of pain, incessant pain – to watch him lying
Abed each morning, longing for the night: –
To sleep – only to sleep again – to fly
Consciousness – all exertion – cracking hours
Of will towards ambitions now long dead,
But once held by the forward-looking stranger? 10
Oh, everlasting shifting of inertia,
To gull the watchful enmity of friends
With an explosive phantasm of momentum!
To pretend life and to be a machine!
For still it *seems* no tunnel, but a cave
Exitless, damp, where he has left the light
Of day for ever. Yet, if it were fed
With air and sun! – if discs of gold should lie,
Never so far between, upon the floor
Of that infernal pilgrimage, then we 20
Down the dear shafts may peep and watch him cross
Stooping, and softly sing of how the beam
Touches his rounded shoulders as he goes.

Behold him, then, on a hot day in June
Wheeling a road through meadows high with flowers
Absorbed in his great misery – and, ah, feel
That sudden sweet solution of all strain,
Melting of misery into the world,
To be rained back again as tenderness,
Beyond all wonder, from the living colours 30
Of flaming buttercups and snowy daisies.

See him discovering the lovingkindness
Of Sleep, dear Sleep, who laps each conscious being
In the warm mother-ocean of its blood,
As nurse Demeter nightly wrapped her charge
In the glorious fire of the gods
To mend his mortal weakness.

Feel with him
The mysterious sense of inner power,
The gleam of light wedged betwixt two huge glooms.

But, most of all, one evening of still light, 40
When the whole world was as the deep floor
Of a vast ocean, which was the still light:
Petals and twigs thrust out into that light
Sustained like seaweed; until his faint soul
Undulated in it like a starfish
Floating translucent in translucent waves.
And the same light engulfed the springing Tower,
Till it too seemed to float, till it became
A filmy drapery of stone that hung, 50
Having no weight, from nothing in the sky,
And, in his summer dreaming, hung again
Over against that sky, and still was drenched
In the rich golden silence, which seemed gathering

Intolerably – until it conceived
And grew big-bellied with terrific meaning,
And the whole dream resounded as with words.
Words which he could not hear, but quickly woke
Sweating, and wept somewhat for loneliness.
But the next morning that incisive horror
Of self-deception, which was closing fast
All avenues to the sounds of the spirit,
Returned upon him and half blotted out
The dream's intensity; which now he thought
Garbled by willing memory to please.

60

Often day smashed the link which night had forged
Betwixt the sick heart and the dungeoned brain.

VIII

And then, one day, he rummaged in a drawer
And found, under a pile of motley goods,
A sheet of folded paper, yellow, writ
Close in his mother's hand, and at the top: –
“A MEMORY”; which, as his eye glanced down,
Rushed wonder first, and then amazed delight
Of recognition; and, for days and days,
As he walked to and fro about the house,
The gentle gesture of a bygone age
Throbbled in his being, captured all his fancy,
And seemed to become a memory of his own: –

10

*The luminous twilight melted into gold,
A clear unruffled lake of gold, that glowed
Behind the hill's low line, and darkened it,*

*As the serene brow of a saint is darkened
Under the brightness of his aureole.
But on this Eastern shoulder, gazing out
Across the valley to a distant height,
There were twain lying still: the evening fell
Settling about them, and the long turf lay* 20
*Under the cool and green air silently.
Even so these two, all wrapped in the great silence,
Lay stretched along the turf; so silently
They gazed, but, as they gazed, held conference
Closer than uttered syllable could yield;
For they drew nearer in this casual hour
Than ever they had been, or ever again
Would be, until death took him from her side.
Did he not know one thing, and, knowing it,
Whisper within himself again, again,* 30
*Marvelling softly; – “Even this moment she
Is fashioning my image in her womb –
Even this moment. . .” till he could not think
Of any other thing, nor speak of this?
The woman heard the whispering of his mind
So plainly that it needed not his voice
To utter the familiar thought; yet peace
Wrapped her entirely from all wondering,
Great peace, not drowsy, but the peace of trees
That wait a-tiptoe for the wind’s first breath,* 40
*Or of the darkness waiting for the light:
In such a stillness of the dawn her soul
Was hushed, as waiting for no common thing.
Out of the green turf of a hill, beyond
The quiet valley, there uprose a tower –*

*Four slender walls, which, rising from the ground
In straight austerity, far, far above
Burst into pinnacles innumerable,
That seemed to float on air; the mellow light
Softened the stone and entered into it, 50
And slowly spread a change over the tower,
Making its corners faint against the blue,
Till it began to dream, till it became
A filmy drapery of stone that hung,
Having no weight, from nothing in the sky.*

*The air grew very still. . . Among the grass
Small insect-noises were so clear, they sounded
Like children shouting afar off. . . There broke
Forth from the tower, on which her listless eyes
Rested in thought, eight lingering, rich tones, 60
Anciently musical, rising and falling
In a sweet chime, whose undulating din
Floated across the valley sedately, borne
In the still lap of evening, till it sank
Into her ears, and settling silverly
About her waiting soul, astonished it. . .*

*As when a painter dawdles on his way
Disconsolate, seeing the common things
With common eyes, and scornful of himself,
Some tiny thing pours a delicious change 70
Over his senses, and he sees again
That they are beautiful – then all at once
Loses that vision, and goes seeking it
In emptiness of soul for days and days –
So startled was the woman by this chime,
Till, as she looked, the greenness of the grass,*

*The curving outline of the hill, the tower,
The sky's unfathomable clarity
Troubled her with their dumbness, and she lay
Full of the evening's beauty – wondering.* 80

*A wonder that died not, but slowly grew,
Opening its noiseless petals – mingled all
With the strange dawning of a tenderness
Beyond all wonder, which enclasped her heart
With curious tiny fingers. Now she felt,
For the first time, that they were not alone,
And love came, like a great sob, suddenly,
Whispering "Mother!" – but she could not speak. . .
Night rustled softly down. . . At last they moved,
Breaking the spell, and rose, and slowly went 90
Whispering together down the darkened hill
Into the valley, where the cottages
Sent up straight wisps of smoke, and shut their door.*

IX

For days and days that far-off evening
Was vivid to his brain, and the still light
A constant presence; loveliest memories
Hovered around him, and a sense of awe –
Of dim connections not yet understood
Betwixt all human beings – kept him warm,
Shutting the night out –
But then with slow pace
Darkness crept back, darkness crept back, darkness,
The loving minion, the pluperfect friend,

And for the first time even upon the Tower 10
Did leer, because the wonder and the sweetness
And all the mystery were dissolved to matter
In the blind workings of his mother's womb.

Yet this he hardly knew yet: his stripped soul
Beyond a naked woman was abashed,
Seeing as in a glass how far the vision
Of a romantic Tower, yes, had buttressed
His peace of mind with mystic-selfish hopes.

Thus did the Tower, high hope's last refuge, crumble
Into hereditary rubble, thus 20
The fairy gold, its magic dream-light dear,
Shrivelled into a litter of dead leaves.
Yet, like a prisoner shovelling dead leaves,
For want of barren tasks, in idleness,
He went on piling intellectual knowledge
On intellectual knowledge, fitting fact
To theory, adding dead thought to dead thought.

X

At last he came into a narrow valley
So steep, that from the windows of the house
Wedged in its bottom an outlooker saw
Not sky but rock. The sun slipped overhead
In a few hours only every day
And all the rest was evening; the caged eye
Nowhere might rest in distance; the hot head
Ached with the evil hammering of itself
Reflected on itself from vertical

Walls – it throbbed with the pressure of the air 10
Of the close valley corked by a huge Peak
Squatting there dead. . . Inhuman tons of rock!
Christened (for so he dreams) by some old lover
Who, with eyes sharpened by the inner shock,
Looked out on a strange world, and did discover
A maiden in a mountain – a sweetheart
Nor warm, nor cold, nor proud, nor meek, nor vain –
Nothing – oh, sexless *Jungfrau!* – wandering heart
Bashing its soft self on a stone. . .

The pain

Swelled like a tumour, till it touched his brain, 20
So that the past and future were shut out,
So that the light itself seemed hideous,
So that to say a kind word to a friend,
To smile or bid Good morning! – these were tasks
Beyond the utmost powers of his will,
Tearing the stomach.

The hard, hollow rocks,

Like corpses of soft earth! And every night
Through large round shining eyes he watched the Moon
Glowing, till hypnotised imagination
Had hoisted his gross flesh on to its crust, 30
And with last gasps he crawled upon its crust
Scorching and hackling in the pitiless glare
Of the kind sun that warms us here, and thought
Of all those kindly atmospheric veils,
Human illusions, which himself had stripped
Severally from himself, till now the soul
Stood parching naked: one by one they had dropped,
Even as the Haunted Sailor's ghastly mates,

Those sweet imaginations of soul-life
Without himself in Nature – one by one, 40
Unmasked by reason, they stood forth revealed
As ghostly emanations from himself,
Then dropped dead. Even the long pain of love
Dissolved in thought's sharp acid – he mistrusts
Some half-willed Rosicrucian exercise
Done by the dim Self working out its way,
Some web of self-enlightenment, unwound
With spider instinct from domestic bowels.

“It is not true!” he cries, “I did not raise
This spectre out of all my own desires 50
And fit it on the first female – they lie!”
But to him shouting only his own voice,
Faint, like the screech of something in a cage,
Came echoing round out of the chill stones.

As some delirious traveller in a storm
That howls all night upon the mountain-side
Enters a chamber, richly tapestried,
Warm, glowing with soft bulbs, and sinks down sighing
In a deep feathery couch, to find the cushions
And all the wood frame and the hangings mist 60
And himself sitting upon a damp stone:
Such seemed his love – such the whole world – unreal –
Nothingness! Nothingness! Yet ever *fear* –
Oh, fear of *what?* Satanic irony!
Fear of the mountains, fear of his own ghost,
Of matter without spirit – horror of Death
Closing in on him on all sides at once,
Choking his physical throat, till all day long
Breath comes in jerks and the heart thumps eccentric

Pinned under private mountains of oppression. 70

One respite only from this state he knew,
One instant of release, no sooner felt
Then finished, and himself clapped back with weights
Into the lazar-house:

Ran down that cleft,
Eternally poured from eternal snows,
A torrent, whose roar drumming down the rocks
Bombed the listening ears all day, all night:
There, as he leaned upon a wooden bridge
And watched the sliding platform of dark waters
Vanishing underneath for ever and ever – 80
Once – in the aimless void of misery –
It seemed the moment blossomed into years,
It seemed the whole world changed into his world:
The awful will-strain tugging at his stomach
Is pulled from under like a water-weed
And whirled down seaward: music of life flows
Through and through suspended limbs
Like water through a grid, while aeons pass.

So sometimes, when men dance upon the ground,
The music and the motion of his limbs 90
Mix for a second, while a dancer's soul
Stands in extreme bliss outside both, dead still,
Upon the mighty Rest that entertains
The motion of the Planets and the Stars.
Dear God, that such a moment will not stay
Even in the memory: it is, and then
Oblivion closes utterly: no fragrance
Hovers to mark the smooth spot where it sank;
Only blank thoughts, while gulls, wheel screaming round

Empty and hungry, without strength to dive. 100

Darker and darker grow the short days: now
The valley seemed to be shutting up its jaws
On him, and solemnly out of the unknown region
Through his thin skull there marches a procession
Of speaking dreams. . . A bed in a dim room
And on it a draped Figure: by his side,
Standing, the dearest of all friends, who stirs
To lift the white sheet, which he would forbid,
Both knowing and not knowing what it hides:
But she has lifted it, and from that bier 110
The dreadful symbol from its glaring sockets
Shoots forth the hated truth that both must die
And be apart for ever. . .

At the tail

Of all these nightmares rose the Tower's self,
Resonant, lovely, and with from its cope
Bells chiming, whose far-welling waves of sound,
Grown visible, all lapped upon his soul
Particularly, like incoming hopes
Of revelation: yet at the same moment
In which he (chosen from all other men 120
For his calm strength and royal dignity
And his great sorrow) was to learn the Secret,
They turned a regiment of little imps
Who frisked about – each was a clack of laughter,
Habitual, wooden laughter, like rough hands
Smearing the fragile bloom from lovely things.
And they had dogged and mocked him all his life
And kept him from his home. And he awoke
To actual thunder spreading through the heavens

Like roots of a huge tree, and lay there still
Quaking and listening. 130

When in two hours
The storm died and the dawn broke, every star
By which until that moment he had steered
His moral course, was blotted: not a motive:
There was no motive left in heart or brain
To stop him practising but what might bring
Immediate comfort to the senses. . .

And

In this void moment he became aware
Of an impersonal Force; it was alive,
Solid; he felt its weight upon his belly 140
And knew moreover that, while his own brain
Mocked it as automatic, as taboo,
Taunting him with old Puritan standards
Ingrained by blood and class – whether or no
It were indeed these, or some nobler thing,
Or meaner – it would hold him from worst evil,
Or what in lost moods he had once called evil.

He slept, and, in the morning, when he woke
To go about his tasks, there was a change:
There was a curious calmness in the air, 150
A gratefulness, like rest to weary limbs.
The pain was gone. But when he looked to find
Old hopes of pleasure flooding back to glut
The hollows of the heart, he looked in vain.
He seemed a vessel which had been uplifted
And turned over and drained, and on a hook
Hung dangling empty in the empty air.

XI

One day, in intimate study of the past
When his imagination was all steeped, and dreaming
Its way along those mazy paths of thought
Which open from contemplating the growth
Into their present seeming-simple meaning
Of smallest, commonest words, a blind thing stirred
Deep in the core of inexpressive mind.
There was no startle, no eureka cry
Of jubilant revelation – none the less
Pivot of lifetime was that moment: Sun 10
Turns himself over down in Ocean's caves:
Earth shivers, and every valley is aware
That a golden head will raise itself
And, looking over the horizon, roll
The white mists back, ha! ha! and drink them up.
For he had dimly seen how Language grows,
Yea, how the noise that thrills out of our mouths
Is a vast voyage of discovery;
And how the thing men call discovery
Is Man's own growing consciousness – pin-point 20
Of radiant light that further flings its beams
And further into the darkness: Ptolemy,
Copernicus and Newton, they are eyes
That carry changing pictures to the brain
Of one slowly growing from boy to man,
From man to poet, and to something more.

As one whose earnest thought dwells long upon
The form and structure of the eye, working
Within its physical workings, faithfully

Led like a child by sense, till soon his trained 30
Imagination freely moves about
Within the quiddity of light, and sees
Seeing itself and how our eyes are veils,
Not windows: thus it is when a fresh mind
With suffering, with labour, with delight
Streams with the streaming sap of language – lo!
Imagination unawares has learnt
To pierce the veil of consciousness itself
And become spirit.

Under a grey dome
Inscribed with echoes of the past, the names 40
Of poets dead, and between double walls
Fashioned of echoes of the past, the thoughts
Of dead men petrified in tomes, he saw,
He saw for ever – as when forked lightning
Shatters the secret night, the flash is vanished,
But not the bright map in the shepherd's brain
Of rocks and trees and shapes of hills and sheep –
That he whose soul would touch the very past
Must build himself a delicate consciousness

Out of the dreams of old civilisations, 50
Must see with ancient eyes, not wisely peer
Through glasses of the last half-hundred years;
And that whose soul would truly touch the present,
Must first have touched the past; how Truth's a stream
That hurries on through complicated webs
Of thought, which meanings of words, ever changing,
Keep letting down into it for a moment,
Till the weak webs are torn away and whirled
On with the rushing torrent. At such times

The caged intensity 60
Of inarticulate, surging thought would drown
His whole rapt soul and swallow up his brain
From reading a word more out of the book,
Would raise his breathing body from its chair
And pace it softly round the huge hushed hive
Of books and buzzing minds, picking its way
Catlike between the inexpressive shoulders
Of hunched, incurious readers – and then out
Through the mute oscillation of swing doors.

Then, as he walked through stony galleries 70
Peopled with statues of old myths and gods,
The constant-crystallizing vegetation
Of man's unfolding dream, congealed in stone,
Those forms began to melt and pass, sliding
Into each other there before his eyes
Bright with intenser thinking, until Time
Sprang into life in his imagination
Incarnate in a visible procession
Of cloudlike shapes. It seemed that a warm vapour
Moved, as he moved, wholly enveloping him 80
From his surrounding, like the magic mist
Poured by Athene round the wanderer
Walking into Phaeacia; and the floor,
The walls, the statues, and the passers by
Slipped back like shadows, but his furious thought,
That was the real world through which he moved.

Outside the door the shock of the winter air
Wrapped itself round his face, and drew their warmth
Out of these blooded thoughts. And in his ears
The voluble angry chattering of ten thousand 90

Small, fussy starlings from the high eaves drowned
The singings that had fill them from within.
Then, in the street itself, the thousand faces
Hurrying past on business important,
Thick mouths, low foreheads, nowhere-looking eyes,
Dark lines drawn by fatigue and suffering,
Dark lines drawn by unending hungriness,
Soft curves drawn by complete stupidity
And lust, and opulent power, lines and curves
Which were the perfect signature of minds 100
That never never could receive such thoughts,
Made those thoughts seem unreal, till at last
They ebbed along the roaring stream of buses
And lost themselves in London – he walked on,
Beholding the world only with his eyes,
Crushed by its weight and passion; but next week
(As if they had but ebbed to flow again)
The thoughts would start to build themselves once more
Into his mind: once more imagination –
Like some huge half-fledged bird, with clanging wings 110
Too stiff to lift its bulk, which flies at last
By taking from the top of scaffoldings
Laboriously erected – soared up sunwards
Over bright fields of green and shimmering life
That lie this side the brain.

The books are closed,
But still the mind, of its own weight, goes on
Challenging, groping, excavating dim
Experiences out of his own past
And of the vast past of the mind of Man,
Till, freed from senses by some accident, 120

High mood, a glimpse of beauty, the sooth fragrance
Of steaming tea – they fluctuate and begin
Forging a body and rhythm of their own
Which fits itself into the Stream of Thought,
So that his own mind buds from history
As part of Life. He sees the sharp horizon
Of man's sense-knowledge suddenly flung out
All ways to limitless distance – and he feels
In his own self the future self of Man
Stirring, awaking, grasping at consciousness 130
Of Life, which since creation has been flowing
Through and through the body unawares,
Asleep – and asleep – till at a sign
The sweet, the long long stored Promethean hour –
Oh, wondering adolescence of the world! –
Brings in self-knowledge with a rush, and calls it
To blossom from blind Being into Truth.

XII

And now, as time flowed onward, normal mood
Came to confirm with more assured consent
Dear inspiration – if this were a dream,
Then what was the true waking? Thus, detached,
He asked himself – and, even detached, could feel
The force of the quick growth of the world's store
Of knowledges, to feed comparison,
Knowledge of earth, of languages, beliefs,
Civilizations, customs, dreams – could mark
Dispassionately his individual place. 10

As one of many minds, purged, from the start,
By the star-cold perspective, of all dreams
Of grossly personal immortality,
Not needing, like his fathers, or like those,
The first philosophers, bred up in myth
As being the air they breathed, to spend much spirit
In puffing his soul clear of mantled fumes.

And he was grateful for that mountain air
Which wrapped and chilled his childhood; for the dawn
Was coming over the mountain, and behold! 20
The far-spread plains beneath, the scarp of Earth,
The works of man, the rivers and white roads
With men upon them walking, who could not see
Past the next rise or corner, and all eager!

Oh, in such high moods, all that mass of fact,
Which sat on his crushed spirit like the stones
Of vast Egyptian tombs, began to lighten,
To stir like loosened wax, to melt, to float,
And the house of the dead, the great museum,
The tomb of expressed dreams, was like a shell 30
Waiting till life should crack it from within.

As busy coral masons in their dark
Labour and pullulate and leave behind
Their limy corpses for a million years,
Until the placid ocean shows its teeth
Found a new reef, and one of them beholds
The blue Pacific heaving in the sunshine,
So did he seem upraised on generations
Of hooded scholars and sharp men of science
Who fed on Aristotle in the dark 40
And on his mother Nature.

Yet not long,
And all this arrogance was pricked with pain
At thought of the great cost – with speechless thanks
To those who had gone on working by their light,
But not by this great light, and above all,
To the sad spirits who abandoned faith,
Not with that truculent glee which brings support,
But out of the pure flame – even though they knew,
Being wise, that most of what they loved must die,
Cowardice and self and pride o'erwhelm the world 50
And the last healer, Art, be starved to death.

He had re-lived himself part of that woe,
Dying his death; but he had risen again
In this world – they had sunk into the tomb
To live there, die there.

Thus, as thought on thought
Came flooding, dream on dream, unfolding petals,
He saw how these, their thoughts, were but slant sections
Of a vast shape beneath it, which each soul
Was working out. The firmament of time
Rushed back, as once before men's startled eyes 60
The firmament of space: and souls were stars:
And worlds on worlds of fresh discovery
Opened before blind eyes which late had seen
One rigid framework with some unfilled gaps
Scarce worth the labour of completing – now
Endless – say rather not even begun;
For this neat abacus, which put up for truth,
Was but the husks of dead truths strung together
By a mechanic joiner: knowledge is not,
Until it is the thing it knoweth; knowledge 70

Is Life incarnating in consciousness.

The pressure of unwritten poetry
Which had so furiously knocked at his blood,
Sitting alone once by the fireside, now
Dies into tranquil tremors of the spirit
And ripples into pure joy; for this man,
Even this man, has spoken face to face
With the eternal Muse – and ever more,
Save in the puny hours, it must be
Matter of accident if himself or other
Be chosen to indite. He has found peace.

80

XIII

He has found peace: gazing upon the world
No longer from without, but from the core
Of self-discovered Being, he can stare
Even accident in the face; for he has seen
How the long wisdom of the living spirit
Uses its accident – the vine’s green tendril
Accepts the loose brick and the rusty nail,
The spider trails her web from the dark coign,
And hollows of all shapes are hives for bees:
“So let my spirit grow upon this symbol –”
(Which, since he found those musical, haunting
Words written by the mother, had been laid
Tacitly by, as into a sealed hole
Chalked up ‘Heredity’) “Henceforth I take
All that is granted thus and thus, with thanks,
With reverence, yet not less as mine own right

10

For use and growth and knowledge – even I,
This whorl of nebulous thinking, whose moist arms
Nodded in circles blindly, till they touched
The Tower, and sucked and gripped and climbed – ”

Marvel! 20

Even as he speaks, the symbol springs to life
Undreamed of: floats before his soul: not fixed,
Not growing: dream nor picture nor idea.
Is it the vision of some shape outside
Or of dark forms built up in his own flesh
And shadowed forth upon the world? The Tower: –
Oh, hearken, hearken, those high bells ring wide
Weaving the web of Life from star to star,
The singing web that beateth down to earth
To join all things discrete in time and space, 30
Banishing emptiness, throbbing betwixt
Petal and petal, finger and finger, word and word,
Washing the island syllables of verse,
Packing with itself each melodic pause
Of music, till the music is as a sea
In which the soul floats outward: Mighty Nurse
And Mother of Becoming! Ocean of sound
Made visible by magic – yet not sound
But rather welling from one heart of Life
Into all space, glutting the crevices 40
Of the seen world.

The strong dream of the Tower

Is but a stone into the pool of Life,
Amplifying its ripples; so that he sees
Them, look! outspreading from the Sun in rays
Of astral light – the blood of God’s own heart –

Into each earth-form, ring of trunk of tree,
Spiral of mollusc, whorl of trumpet-flower,
And the slow-breathing orbits of his thinking
Striving to be all these things – to be earth,
And the calm sky above, and the still light 50
That enters into all things equally.

For, as the Tower uprose out of its floor
Into the light, and into the still light
Outgrowing from the Sun – scattering forth
The din of its high bells, gold into gold,
So seemed his breath to rise from his round lungs,
As from a lesser Earth, until it lost
Itself in a vast heaven of still thought,
Whereinto brain poured out the forms it drew
From the dark air beneath it – sounding forth 60
Resonant, yet unheard. Even as in dreams,
Where we *are* all we listen to, so he
Was one with earth and sky, being between.

There is a mystery of this being between
Hard to be solved by man, who is himself
That Being. Thus, the light on the grey Tower,
Which melted earth and sky to a round pearl
Of peace and summer stillness and calm joy,
Was rare upon it: at all other times
It shot bewilderingly, now bright, now dull, 70
Now starting solid from the dull dry glare,
Part of the earth, under the arch of the sky,
Now mingling in the mist, its fainting corners
Streaming out into rain, as though the stones
Were an unreal streak of the soft air:
Now earth, now sky – by turns – how rarely both!

Even thus man, knowing, becomes all he knows,
Losing himself – and sleeps – or finds himself
And is cut off from knowledge, from all life
Save his one world of folly: the weak child, 80
That must creep back into its mother's womb
And lose its life in hers, or else must fall
Out of her breast, and die of the steel cold!
He stiffens, falls out, conscious. . . and there come
The demons, shyness, shame, habitual laughter,
Keeping him trivial, shutting him quite out
From the one source of truth, till, lo! he dies
Into metallic, yankee heartlessness
Rasping, or thin disguised as urbane taste,
Seeking only his comfort.

Oh, ye gods! 90

Ye gods that bound yourselves on rock and cross
To become our life – only let us want,
Infinitely, nothing for ourselves,
And we shall set you free: let us but feel
And we may be ourselves and be alive!
But when we feel not, we are still unborn,
Asleep, dim embryos of your wombs – or lost,
Drowsing in snow. Torture us back to life,
Even as ye tortured him! Oh, in your shapes
Of cloud and tree and rock – building of man – 100
And form of woman – hide with the old skill
Those cruel memories of the loveliness,
The huge unearthly wisdom, which are ours
While we lie sleeping. Change these curdling hearts,
Even as his was changed, tearing away
All other their supports but this your Life –

This wind that blows about us in the wilderness –
Until we be confounded – till we know not
What can be left to feel for, hate ourselves
For every idiot passion.

When he grieved

110

Of old, pride rushed to solace him with dreams
Of his own strength and dignity: where now
Was pride? Or it but raised its charming crest,
And straight he loathed and bruised it, knowing well
Himself, eternally afraid – himself,
Eternally afraid of life and death.

Yet midst this tumult of uncertain passion
Not comprehended – fluctuating – wild –
Stood – like a pharos on its hidden rock –

The meaning of the Tower – still a-building,

120

And he could add new stones, as he found strength,
Drawing foundations of blind life up to
The sky of wisdom – he and all men else,
Rearing a second Babel, wedding earth
And heaven, not now for power, but for love.

Till, as life travelled on its quieter way,
Great confidence came creeping to his heart

That on it also, even as odour

Flits to each opening blossom, and must flit,

Courage would light – from that same Union!

130

Whose other child was Poesy, and whose pledge
Was the eternal mystery of light
Ever recurring now to memory
Or sinking with new glory into his eyes,
And the calm sweetness, and the singing voice
Of bells that rang rang rang through his whole being,

Answering all the riddles of the world
With: – What is Poesy? The second birth!
It is the incarnation of this flesh
Into this consciousness. What is this flesh? 140
It is my hair, my limbs, but it is, too,
My grass, my trees, my splinters of red rock
Folded and crumpled round me: I am Earth:
But I am still asleep: knowledge is waking,
And Poesy the dream that waking brings.
There is a noise of trumpets in the mouth
Of Wisdom, and their voice is Poesy
Expressing incarnation – Dear my Joy! –
Expressing incarnation of wise Earth
Into this conscious self of Everyman, 150
Even thine and mine and all men's, all in one
And one in all – one ring of all the dancers
Shouting in chorus with uplifted mouths
And fast-linked hands, and with what grave precision
Drawing a figured Zodiac from that love,
Selfless, outpouring, which is even now
Our Earth's unlimited soul, which is our sleeping,
And all the hidden meaning of our lives.

FINIS

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