

**DRINKWATER**

**JOHN**

POEMS,

1908-1919

John Drinkwater  
**Poems, 1908-1919**

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# **John Drinkwater**

## **Poems, 1908-1919**

### **RECIPROCITY**

I DO not think that skies and meadows are  
Moral, or that the fixture of a star  
Comes of a quiet spirit, or that trees  
Have wisdom in their windless silences.  
Yet these are things invested in my mood  
With constancy, and peace, and fortitude,  
That in my troubled season I can cry  
Upon the wide composure of the sky,  
And envy fields, and wish that I might be  
As little daunted as a star or tree.

## THE HOURS

Those hours are best when suddenly  
The voices of the world are still,  
And in that quiet place is heard  
The voice of one small singing bird,  
Alone within his quiet tree;

When to one field that crowns a hill,  
With but the sky for neighbourhood,  
The crowding counties of my brain  
Give all their riches, lake and plain,  
Cornland and fell and pillared wood;  
When in a hill-top acre, bare  
For the seed's use, I am aware  
Of all the beauty that an age  
Of earth has taught my eyes to see;

When Pride and Generosity  
The Constant Heart and Evil Rage,  
Affection and Desire, and all  
The passions of experience  
Are no more tabled in my mind,  
Learning's idolatry, but find  
Particularity of sense  
In daily fortitudes that fall  
From this or that companion,  
Or in an angry gossip's word;  
When one man speaks for Every One,  
When Music lives in one small bird,  
When in a furrowed hill we see  
All beauty in epitome —  
Those hours are best; for those belong  
To the lucidity of song.

## A TOWN WINDOW

Beyond my window in the night  
Is but a drab inglorious street,  
Yet there the frost and clean starlight  
As over Warwick woods are sweet.

Under the grey drift of the town  
The crocus works among the mould  
As eagerly as those that crown  
The Warwick spring in flame and gold.

And when the tramway down the hill  
Across the cobbles moans and rings,  
There is about my window-sill  
The tumult of a thousand wings.

## MYSTERY

Think not that mystery has place  
In the obscure and veiled face,  
Or when the midnight watches are  
Unaccompanied of moon or star,  
Or where the fields and forests lie  
Enfolded from the loving eye  
By fogs rebellious to the sun,  
Or when the poet's rhymes are spun  
From dreams that even in his own  
Imagining are half-unknown.

These are not mystery, but mere  
Conditions that deny the clear  
Reality that lies behind  
The weak, unspeculative mind,  
Behind contagions of the air  
And screens of beauty everywhere,  
The brooding and tormented sky,  
The hesitation of an eye.

Look rather when the landscapes glow  
Through crystal distances as though  
The forty shires of England spread  
Into one vision harvested,  
Or when the moonlit waters lie  
In silver cold lucidity;  
Those countenances search that bear  
Witness to very character,  
And listen to the song that weighs  
A life's adventure in a phrase —  
These are the founts of wonder, these  
The plainer miracles to please  
The brain that reads the world aright;  
Here is the mystery of light.

## THE COMMON LOT

When youth and summer-time are gone,  
And age puts quiet garlands on,  
And in the speculative eye  
The fires of emulation die,  
But as to-day our time shall be  
Trembling upon eternity,  
While, still inconstant in debate,  
We shall on revelation wait,  
And age as youth will daily plan  
The sailing of the caravan.

## PASSAGE

When you deliberate the page  
Of Alexander's pilgrimage,  
Or say – "It is three years, or ten,  
Since Easter slew Connolly's men,"  
Or prudently to judgment come  
Of Antony or Absalom,  
And think how duly are designed  
Case and instruction for the mind,  
Remember then that also we,  
In a moon's course, are history.

## THE WOOD

I walked a nut-wood's gloom. And overhead  
A pigeon's wing beat on the hidden boughs,  
And shrews upon shy tunnelling woke thin  
Late winter leaves with trickling sound. Across  
My narrow path I saw the carrier ants  
Burdened with little pieces of bright straw.  
These things I heard and saw, with senses fine  
For all the little traffic of the wood,  
While everywhere, above me, underfoot,  
And haunting every avenue of leaves,  
Was mystery, unresting, taciturn.

...

And haunting the lucidities of life  
That are my daily beauty, moves a theme,  
Beating along my undiscovered mind.

## HISTORY

Sometimes, when walls and occupation seem  
A prison merely, a dark barrier  
Between me everywhere  
And life, or the larger province of the mind,  
As dreams confined,  
As the trouble of a dream,  
I seek to make again a life long gone,  
To be  
My mind's approach and consolation,  
To give it form's lucidity,  
Resilient form, as porcelain pieces thrown  
In buried China by a wrist unknown,  
Or mirrored brigs upon Fowey sea.

Then to my memory comes nothing great  
Of purpose, or debate,  
Or perfect end,  
Pomp, nor love's rapture, nor heroic hours to spend —  
But most, and strangely, for long and so much have I seen,  
Comes back an afternoon  
Of a June  
Sunday at Elsfield, that is up on a green  
Hill, and there,  
Through a little farm parlour door,  
A floor  
Of red tiles and blue,  
And the air  
Sweet with the hot June sun cascading through  
The vine-leaves under the glass, and a scarlet fume  
Of geranium flower, and soft and yellow bloom  
Of musk, and stains of scarlet and yellow glass.

Such are the things remain  
Quietly, and for ever, in the brain,  
And the things that they choose for history-making pass.

## THE FUGITIVE

Beauty has come to make no longer stay  
Than the bright buds of May  
In May-time do.

Beauty is with us for one hour, one hour,  
Life is so brief a flower;  
Thoughts are so few.

Thoughts are so few with mastery to give  
Shape to these fugitive  
Dear brevities,

That even in its hour beauty is blind,  
Because the shallow mind  
Not sees, not sees.

And in the mind of man only can be  
Alert prosperity  
For beauty brief.

So, what can be but little comes to less  
Upon the wilderness  
Of unbelief.

And beauty that has but an hour to spend  
With you for friend,  
Goes outcast by.

But know, but know – for all she is outcast —  
It is not she at last,  
But you that die.

## CONSTANCY

The shadows that companion me  
From chronicles and poetry  
More constant and substantial are  
Than these my men familiar,  
Who draw with me uncertain breath  
A little while this side of death;  
For you, my friend, may fail to keep  
To-morrow's tryst, so darkly deep  
The motions mutable that give  
To flesh its brief prerogative,  
And in the pleasant hours we make  
Together for devotion's sake,  
Always the testament I see  
That is our twin mortality.  
But those from the recorded page  
Keep an eternal pilgrimage.  
They stedfastly inhabit here  
With no mortality to fear,  
And my communion with them  
Ails not in the mind's stratagem  
Against the sudden blow, the date  
That once must fall unfortunate.  
They fret not nor persuade, and when  
These graduates I entertain,  
I grieve not that I too must fall  
As you, my friend, to funeral,  
But rather find example there  
That, when my boughs of time are bare,  
And nothing more the body's chance  
Governs my careful circumstance,  
I shall, upon that later birth,  
Walk in immortal fields of earth.

## SOUTHAMPTON BELLS

### I

Long ago some builder thrust  
Heavenward in Southampton town  
His spire and beamed his bells,  
Largely conceiving from the dust  
That pinnacle for ringing down  
Orisons and Noëls.

In his imagination rang,  
Through generations challenging  
His peal on simple men,  
Who, as the heart within him sang,  
In daily townfaring should sing  
By year and year again.

### II

Now often to their ringing go  
The bellmen with lean Time at heel,  
Intent on daily cares;  
The bells ring high, the bells ring low,  
The ringers ring the builder's peal  
Of tidings unawares.

And all the bells' might well be dumb  
For any quickening in the street  
Of customary ears;  
And so at last proud builders come  
With dreams and virtues to defeat  
Among the clouding years.

### III

Now, waiting on Southampton sea  
For exile, through the silver night  
I hear Noël! Noël!  
Through generations down to me  
Your challenge, builder, comes aright,

Bell by obedient bell.

You wake an hour with me; then wide  
Though be the lapses of your sleep  
You yet shall wake again;  
And thus, old builder, on the tide  
Of immortality you keep  
Your way from brain to brain.

## THE NEW MIRACLE

Of old men wrought strange gods for mystery,  
Implored miraculous tokens in the skies,  
And lips that most were strange in prophecy  
Were most accounted wise.

The hearthstone's commerce between mate and mate,  
Barren of wonder, prospered in content,  
And still the hunger of their thought was great  
For sweet astonishment.

And so they built them altars of retreat  
Where life's familiar use was overthrown,  
And left the shining world about their feet,  
To travel worlds unknown.

...

We hunger still. But wonder has come down  
From alien skies upon the midst of us;  
The sparkling hedgerow and the clamorous town  
Have grown miraculous.

And man from his far travelling returns  
To find yet stranger wisdom than he sought,  
Where in the habit of his threshold burns  
Unfathomable thought.

## REVERIE

Here in the unfrequented noon,  
In the green hermitage of June,  
While overhead a rustling wing  
Minds me of birds that do not sing  
Until the cooler eve reawakes  
The service of melodious brakes,  
And thoughts are lonely rangers, here,  
In shelter of the primrose year,  
I curiously meditate  
Our brief and variable state.

I think how many are alive  
Who better in the grave would thrive,  
If some so long a sleep might give  
Better instruction how to live;  
I think what splendours had been said  
By darlings now untimely dead  
Had death been wise in choice of these,  
And made exchange of obsequies.

I think what loss to government  
It is that good men are content —  
Well knowing that an evil will  
Is folly-stricken too, and still  
Itself considers only wise  
For all rebukes and surgeries —  
That evil men should raise their pride  
To place and fortune undefied.  
I think how daily we beguile  
Our brains, that yet a little while  
And all our congregated schemes  
And our perplexity of dreams,  
Shall come to whole and perfect state.  
I think, however long the date  
Of life may be, at last the sun  
Shall pass upon campaigns undone.

I look upon the world and see  
A world colonial to me,  
Whereof I am the architect,  
And principal and intellect,  
A world whose shape and savour spring  
Out of my lone imagining,  
A world whose nature is subdued  
For ever to my instant mood,

And only beautiful can be  
Because of beauty is in me.  
And then I know that every mind  
Among the millions of my kind  
Makes earth his own particular  
And privately created star,  
That earth has thus no single state,  
Being every man articulate.  
Till thought has no horizon then  
I try to think how many men  
There are to make an earth apart  
In symbol of the urgent heart,  
For there are forty in my street,  
And seven hundred more in Greet,  
And families at Luton Hoo,  
And there are men in China, too.

And what immensity is this  
That is but a parenthesis  
Set in a little human thought,  
Before the body comes to naught.  
There at the bottom of the copse  
I see a field of turnip tops,  
I see the cropping cattle pass  
There in another field, of grass.  
And fields and fields, with seven towns,  
A river, and a flight of downs,  
Steeple for all religious men,  
Ten thousand trees, and orchards ten,  
A mighty span that curves away  
Into blue beauty, and I lay  
All this as quartered on a sphere  
Hung huge in space, a thing of fear  
Vast as the circle of the sky  
Completed to the astonished eye;  
And then I think that all I see,  
Whereof I frame immensity  
Globed for amazement, is no more  
Than a shire's corner, and that four  
Great shires being ten times multiplied  
Are small on the Atlantic tide  
As an emerald on a silver bowl ...  
And the Atlantic to the whole  
Sweep of this tributary star  
That is our earth is but ... and far  
Through dreadful space the outmeasured mind  
Seeks to conceive the unconfined.

I think of Time. How, when his wing

Composes all our quarrelling  
In some green corner where May leaves  
Are loud with blackbirds on all eves,  
And all the dust that was our bones  
Is underneath memorial stones,  
Then shall old jealousies, while we  
Lie side by side most quietly,  
Be but oblivion's fools, and still  
When curious pilgrims ask – “What skill  
Had these that from oblivion saves?” —  
My song shall sing above our graves.

I think how men of gentle mind,  
And friendly will, and honest kind,  
Deny their nature and appear  
Fellows of jealousy and fear;  
Having single faith, and natural wit  
To measure truth and cherish it,  
Yet, strangely, when they build in thought,  
Twisting the honesty that wrought  
In the straight motion of the heart,  
Into its feigning counterpart  
That is the brain's betrayal of  
The simple purposes of love;  
And what yet sorrier decline  
Is theirs when, eager to confine  
No more within the silent brain  
Its habit, thought seeks birth again  
In speech, as honesty has done  
In thought; then even what had won  
From heart to brain fades and is lost  
In this pretended pentecost,  
This their forlorn captivity  
To speech, who have not learnt to be  
Lords of the word, nor kept among  
The sterner climates of the tongue ...  
So truth is in their hearts, and then  
Falls to confusion in the brain,  
And, fading through this mid-eclipse,  
It perishes upon the lips.

I think how year by year I still  
Find working in my dauntless will  
Sudden timidities that are  
Merely the echo of some far  
Forgotten tyrannies that came  
To youth's bewilderment and shame;  
That yet a magisterial gown,  
Being worn by one of no renown

And half a generation less  
In years than I, can dispossess  
Something my circumspecter mood  
Of excellence and quietude,  
And if a Bishop speaks to me  
I tremble with propriety.

I think how strange it is that he  
Who goes most comradely with me  
In beauty's worship, takes delight  
In shows that to my eager sight  
Are shadows and unmanifest,  
While beauty's favour and behest  
To me in motion are revealed  
That is against his vision sealed;  
Yet is our hearts' necessity  
Not twofold, but a common plea  
That chaos come to continence,  
Whereto the arch-intelligence  
Richly in divers voices makes  
Its answer for our several sakes.

I see the disinherited  
And long procession of the dead,  
Who have in generations gone  
Held fugitive dominion  
Of this same primrose pasturage  
That is my momentary wage.  
I see two lovers move along  
These shadowed silences of song,  
With spring in blossom at their feet  
More incommunicably sweet  
To their hearts' more magnificence,  
Than to the common courts of sense,  
Till joy his tardy closure tells  
With coming of the curfew bells.  
I see the knights of spur and sword  
Crossing the little woodland ford,  
Riding in ghostly cavalcade  
On some unchronicled crusade.  
I see the silent hunter go  
In cloth of yeoman green, with bow  
Strung, and a quiver of grey wings.  
I see the little herd who brings  
His cattle homeward, while his sire  
Makes bivouac in Warwickshire  
This night, the liege and loyal man  
Of Cavalier or Puritan.  
And as they pass, the nameless dead,

Unsung, uncelebrate, and sped  
Upon an unremembered hour  
As any twelvemonth fallen flower,  
I think how strangely yet they live  
For all their days were fugitive.

I think how soon we too shall be  
A story with our ancestry.

I think what miracle has been  
That you whose love among this green  
Delightful solitude is still  
The stay and substance of my will,  
The dear custodian of my song,  
My thrifty counsellor and strong,  
Should take the time of all time's tide  
That was my season, to abide  
On earth also; that we should be  
Charted across eternity  
To one elect and happy day  
Of yellow primroses in May.

The clock is calling five o'clock,  
And Nonesopretty brings her flock  
To fold, and Tom comes back from town  
With hose and ribbons worth a crown,  
And duly at The Old King's Head  
They gather now to daily bread,  
And I no more may meditate  
Our brief and variable state.

## PENANCES

These are my happy penances. To make  
Beauty without a covenant; to take  
Measure of time only because I know  
That in death's market-place I still shall owe  
Service to beauty that shall not be done;  
To know that beauty's doctrine is begun  
And makes a close in sacrifice; to find  
In beauty's courts the unappeasable mind.

## LAST CONFSSIONAL

For all ill words that I have spoken,  
For all clear moods that I have broken,  
For all despite and hasty breath,  
Forgive me, Love, forgive me, Death.

Death, master of the great assize,  
Love, falling now to memories,  
You two alone I need to prove,  
Forgive me, Death, forgive me, Love.

For every tenderness undone,  
For pride when holiness was none  
But only easy charity,  
O Death, be pardoner to me.

For stubborn thought that would not make  
Measure of love's thought for love's sake,  
But kept a sullen difference,  
Take, Love, this laggard penitence.

For cloudy words too vainly spent  
To prosper but in argument,  
When truth stood lonely at the gate,  
On your compassion, Death, I wait.

For all the beauty that escaped  
This foolish brain, unsung, unshaped,  
For wonder that was slow to move,  
Forgive me, Death, forgive me, Love.

For love that kept a secret cruse,  
For life defeated of its dues,  
This latest word of all my breath —  
Forgive me, Love, forgive me, Death.

## BIRTHRIGHT

Lord Rameses of Egypt sighed  
Because a summer evening passed;  
And little Ariadne cried  
That summer fancy fell at last  
To dust; and young Verona died  
When beauty's hour was overcast.

Theirs was the bitterness we know  
Because the clouds of hawthorn keep  
So short a state, and kisses go  
To tombs unfathomably deep,  
While Rameses and Romeo  
And little Ariadne sleep.

## ANTAGONISTS

Green shoots, we break the morning earth  
And flourish in the morning's breath;  
We leave the agony of birth  
And soon are all midway to death.

While yet the summer of her year  
Brings life her marvels, she can see  
Far off the rising dust, and hear  
The footfall of her enemy.

## HOLINESS

If all the carts were painted gay,  
And all the streets swept clean,  
And all the children came to play  
By hollyhocks, with green  
Grasses to grow between,

If all the houses looked as though  
Some heart were in their stones,  
If all the people that we know  
Were dressed in scarlet gowns,  
With feathers in their crowns,

I think this gaiety would make  
A spiritual land.  
I think that holiness would take  
This laughter by the hand,  
Till both should understand.

## THE CITY

A shining city, one  
Happy in snow and sun,  
And singing in the rain  
A paradisaal strain...  
Here is a dream to keep,  
O Builders, from your sleep.

O foolish Builders, wake,  
Take your trowels, take  
The poet's dream, and build  
The city song has willed,  
That every stone may sing  
And all your roads may ring  
With happy wayfaring.

## TO THE DEFILERS

Go, thieves, and take your riches, creep  
To corners out of honest sight;  
We shall not be so poor to keep  
One thought of envy or despite.

But know that in sad surety when  
Your sullen will betrays this earth  
To sorrows of contagion, then  
Beelzebub renews his birth.

When you defile the pleasant streams  
And the wild bird's abiding-place,  
You massacre a million dreams  
And cast your spittle in God's face.

## A CHRISTMAS NIGHT

Christ for a dream was given from the dead  
To walk one Christmas night on earth again,  
Among the snow, among the Christmas bells.  
He heard the hymns that are his praise: *Noël*,  
And *Christ is Born*, and *Babe of Bethlehem*.  
He saw the travelling crowds happy for home,  
The gathering and the welcome, and the set  
Feast and the gifts, because he once was born,  
Because he once was steward of a word.  
And so he thought, "The spirit has been kind;  
So well the peoples might have fallen from me,  
My way of life being difficult and spare.  
It is beautiful that a dream in Galilee  
Should prosper so. They crucified me once,  
And now my name is spoken through the world,  
And bells are rung for me and candles burnt.  
They might have crucified my dream who used  
My body ill; they might have spat on me  
Always as in one hour on Golgotha." ...  
And the snow fell, and the last bell was still,  
And the poor Christ again was with the dead.

## INVOCATION

As pools beneath stone arches take  
Darkly within their deeps again  
Shapes of the flowing stone, and make  
Stories anew of passing men,

So let the living thoughts that keep,  
Morning and evening, in their kind,  
Eternal change in height and deep,  
Be mirrored in my happy mind.

Beat, world, upon this heart, be loud  
Your marvel chanted in my blood,  
Come forth, O sun, through cloud on cloud  
To shine upon my stubborn mood.

Great hills that fold above the sea,  
Ecstatic airs and sparkling skies,  
Sing out your words to master me,  
Make me immoderately wise.

## IMMORTALITY

### I

When other beauty governs other lips,  
And snowdrops come to strange and happy springs,  
When seas renewed bear yet unbuilt ships,  
And alien hearts know all familiar things,  
When frosty nights bring comrades to enjoy  
Sweet hours at hearths where we no longer sit,  
When Liverpool is one with dusty Troy,  
And London famed as Attica for wit ...  
How shall it be with you, and you, and you,  
How with us all who have gone greatly here  
In friendship, making some delight, some true  
Song in the dark, some story against fear?  
Shall song still walk with love, and life be brave,  
And we, who were all these, be but the grave?

### II

No; lovers yet shall tell the nightingale  
Sometimes a song that we of old time made,  
And gossips gathered at the twilight ale  
Shall say, "Those two were friends," or, "Unafraid  
Of bitter thought were those because they loved  
Better than most." And sometimes shall be told  
How one, who died in his young beauty, moved,  
As Astrophel, those English hearts of old.  
And the new seas shall take the new ships home  
Telling how yet the Dymock orchards stand,  
And you shall walk with Julius at Rome,  
And Paul shall be my fellow in the Strand;  
There in the midst of all those words shall be  
Our names, our ghosts, our immortality.

## THE CRAFTSMEN

Confederate hand and eye  
Work to the chisel's blade,  
Setting the grain aglow  
Of porch and sturdy beam —  
So the strange gods may ply  
Strict arms till we are made  
Quick as the gods who know  
What builds behind this dream.

## SYMBOLS

I saw history in a poet's song,  
In a river-reach and a gallows-hill,  
In a bridal bed, and a secret wrong,  
In a crown of thorns: in a daffodil.

I imagined measureless time in a day,  
And starry space in a waggon-road,  
And the treasure of all good harvests lay  
In the single seed that the sower sowed.

My garden-wind had driven and havened again  
All ships that ever had gone to sea,  
And I saw the glory of all dead men  
In the shadow that went by the side of me.

## SEALED

The doves call down the long arcades of pine,  
The screaming swifts are tiring towards their eaves,  
And you are very quiet, O lover of mine.

No foot is on your ploughlands now, the song  
Fails and is no more heard among your leaves  
That wearied not in praise the whole day long.

I have watched with you till this twilight-fall,  
The proud companion of your loveliness;  
Have you no word for me, no word at all?

The passion of my thought I have given you,  
Striving towards your passion, nevertheless,  
The clover leaves are deepening to the dew,

And I am still unsatisfied, untaught.  
You lie guarded in mystery, you go  
Into your night, and leave your lover naught.

Would I were Titan with immeasurable thews  
To hold you trembling, lover of mine, and know  
To the full the secret savour that you use

Now to my tormenting. I would drain  
Your beauty to the last sharp glory of it;  
You should work mightily through me, blood and brain.

Your heart in my heart's mastery should burn,  
And you before my swift and arrogant wit  
Should be no longer proudly taciturn.

You should bend back astonished at my kiss,  
Your wisdom should be armourer to my pride,  
And you, subdued, should yet be glad of this.

The joys of great heroic lovers dead  
Should seem but market-gossiping beside  
The annunciation of our bridal bed.

And now, my lover earth, I am a leaf,  
A wave of light, a bird's note, a blade sprung  
Towards the oblivion of the sickled sheaf;

A mere mote driven against your royal ease,

A tattered eager traveller among  
The myriads beating on your sanctuaries.

I have no strength to crush you to my will,  
Your beauty is invulnerably zoned,  
Yet I, your undefeated lover still,

Exulting in your sap am clear of shame,  
And biding with you patiently am throned  
Above the flight of desolation's aim.

You may be mute, bestow no recompense  
On all the thriftless leaguers of my soul —  
I am at your gates, O lover of mine, and thence

Will I not turn for any scorn you send,  
Rebuked, bemused, yet is my purpose whole,  
I shall be striving towards you till the end.

## A PRAYER

Lord, not for light in darkness do we pray,  
Not that the veil be lifted from our eyes,  
Nor that the slow ascension of our day  
Be otherwise.

Not for a clearer vision of the things  
Whereof the fashioning shall make us great,  
Not for remission of the peril and stings  
Of time and fate.

Not for a fuller knowledge of the end  
Whereto we travel, bruised yet unafraid,  
Nor that the little healing that we lend  
Shall be repaid.

Not these, O Lord. We would not break the bars  
Thy wisdom sets about us; we shall climb  
Unfettered to the secrets of the stars  
In Thy good time.

We do not crave the high perception swift  
When to refrain were well, and when fulfil,  
Nor yet the understanding strong to sift  
The good from ill.

Not these, O Lord. For these Thou hast revealed,  
We know the golden season when to reap  
The heavy-fruited treasure of the field,  
The hour to sleep.

Not these. We know the hemlock from the rose,  
The pure from stained, the noble from the base  
The tranquil holy light of truth that glows  
On Pity's face.

We know the paths wherein our feet should press,  
Across our hearts are written Thy decrees,  
Yet now, O Lord, be merciful to bless  
With more than these.

Grant us the will to fashion as we feel,  
Grant us the strength to labour as we know,  
Grant us the purpose, ribbed and edged with steel,  
To strike the blow.

Knowledge we ask not – knowledge Thou hast lent,  
But, Lord, the will – there lies our bitter need,  
Give us to build above the deep intent  
The deed, the deed.

## THE BUILDING

Whence these hods, and bricks of bright red clay,  
And swart men climbing ladders in the night?

Stilled are the clamorous energies of day,  
The streets are dumb, and, prodigal of light,  
The lamps but shine upon a city of sleep.  
A step goes out into the silence; far  
Across the quiet roofs the hour is tolled  
From ghostly towers; the indifferent earth may keep  
That ragged flotsam shielded from the cold  
In earth's good time: not, moving among men,  
Shall he compel so fortunate a star.  
Pavements I know, forsaken now, are strange,  
Alien walks not beautiful, that then,  
In the familiar day, are part of all  
My breathless pilgrimage, not beautiful, but dear;  
The monotony of sound has suffered change,  
The eddies of wanton sound are spent, and clear  
To bleak monotonies of silence fall.

And, while the city sleeps, in the central poise  
Of quiet, lamps are flaming in the night,  
Blown to long tongues by winds that moan between  
The growing walls, and throwing misty light  
On swart men bearing bricks of bright red clay  
In laden hods; and ever the thin noise  
Of trowels deftly fashioning the clean  
Long lines that are the shaping of proud thought.  
Ghost-like they move between the day and day,  
These men whose labour strictly shall be wrought  
Into the captive image of a dream.  
Their sinews weary not, the plummet falls  
To measured use from steadfast hands apace,  
And momentarily the moist and levelled seam  
Knits brick to brick and momentarily the walls  
Bestow the wonder of form on formless space.

And whence all these? The hod and plummet-line,  
The trowels tapping, and the lamps that shine  
In long, dust-heavy beams from wall to wall,  
The mortar and the bricks of bright red clay,  
Ladder and corded scaffolding, and all  
The gear of common traffic – whence are they?  
And whence the men who use them?  
When he came,

God upon chaos, crying in the name  
Of all adventurous vision that the void  
Should yield up man, and man, created, rose  
Out of the deep, the marvel of all things made,  
Then in immortal wonder was destroyed  
All worth of trivial knowledge, and the close  
Of man's most urgent meditation stayed  
Even as his first thought – "Whence am I sprung?"  
What proud ecstatic mystery was pent  
In that first act for man's astonishment,  
From age to unconfessing age, among  
His manifold travel. And in all I see  
Of common daily usage is renewed  
This primal and ecstatic mystery  
Of chaos bidden into many-hued  
Wonders of form, life in the void create,  
And monstrous silence made articulate.

Not the first word of God upon the deep  
Nor the first pulse of life along the day  
More marvellous than these new walls that sweep  
Starward, these lines that discipline the clay,  
These lamps swung in the wind that send their light  
On swart men climbing ladders in the night.  
No trowel-tap but sings anew for men  
The rapture of quickening water and continent,  
No mortared line but witnesses again  
Chaos transfigured into lineament.

## THE SOLDIER

The large report of fame I lack,  
And shining clasps and crimson scars,  
For I have held my bivouac  
Alone amid the untroubled stars.

My battle-field has known no dawn  
Beclouded by a thousand spears;  
I've been no mounting tyrant's pawn  
To buy his glory with my tears.

It never seemed a noble thing  
Some little leagues of land to gain  
From broken men, nor yet to fling  
Abroad the thunderbolts of pain.

Yet I have felt the quickening breath  
As peril heavy peril kissed —  
My weapon was a little faith,  
And fear was my antagonist.

Not a brief hour of cannonade,  
But many days of bitter strife,  
Till God of His great pity laid  
Across my brow the leaves of life.

## THE FIRES OF GOD

### I

Time gathers to my name;  
Along the ways wheredown my feet have passed  
I see the years with little triumph crowned,  
Exulting not for perils dared, downcast  
And weary-eyed and desolate for shame  
Of having been unstirred of all the sound  
Of the deep music of the men that move  
Through the world's days in suffering and love.

Poor barren years that brooded over-much  
On your own burden, pale and stricken years —  
Go down to your oblivion, we part  
With no reproach or ceremonial tears.  
Henceforth my hands are lifted to the touch  
Of hands that labour with me, and my heart  
Hereafter to the world's heart shall be set  
And its own pain forget.  
Time gathers to my name —  
Days dead are dark; the days to be, a flame  
Of wonder and of promise, and great cries  
Of travelling people reach me – I must rise.

### II

Was I not man? Could I not rise alone  
Above the shifting of the things that be,  
Rise to the crest of all the stars and see  
The ways of all the world as from a throne?  
Was I not man, with proud imperial will  
To cancel all the secrets of high heaven?  
Should not my sole unbridled purpose fill  
All hidden paths with light when once was riven  
God's veil by my indomitable will?

So dreamt I, little man of little vision,  
Great only in unconsecrated pride;  
Man's pity grew from pity to derision,  
And still I thought, "Albeit they deride,  
Yet is it mine uncharted ways to dare

Unknown to these,  
And they shall stumble darkly, unaware  
Of solemn mysteries  
Whereof the key is mine alone to bear.”

So I forgot my God, and I forgot  
The holy sweet communion of men,  
And moved in desolate places, where are not  
Meek hands held out with patient healing when  
The hours are heavy with uncharitable pain;  
No company but vain  
And arrogant thoughts were with me at my side.  
And ever to myself I lied.  
Saying “Apart from all men thus I go  
To know the things that they may never know.”

### III

Then a great change befell;  
Long time I stood  
In witless hardihood  
With eyes on one sole changeless vision set —  
The deep disturbèd fret  
Of men who made brief tarrying in hell  
On their earth travelling.  
It was as though the lives of men should be  
See circle-wise, whereof one little span  
Through which all passed was blackened with the wing  
Of perilous evil, bateless misery.  
But all beyond, making the whole complete  
O'er which the travelling feet  
Of every man  
Made way or ever he might come to death,  
Was odorous with the breath  
Of honey-laden flowers, and alive  
With sacrificial ministrations sweet  
Of man to man, and swift and holy loves,  
And large heroic hopes, whereby should thrive  
Man's spirit as he moves  
From dawn of life to the great dawn of death.

It was as though mine eyes were set alone  
Upon that woeful passage of despair,  
Until I held that life had never known  
Dominion but in this most troubled place  
Where many a ruined grace  
And many a friendless care

Ran to and fro in sorrowful unrest.  
Still in my hand I pressed  
Hope's fragile chalice, whence I drew deep draughts  
That heartened me that even yet should grow  
Out of this dread confusion, as of broken crafts  
Driven along ungovernable seas,  
Prosperous order, and that I should know  
After long vigil all the mysteries  
Of human wonder and of human fate.

O fool, O only great  
In pride unhallowed, O most blind of heart!  
Confusion but more dark confusion bred,  
Grief nurtured grief, I cried aloud and said,  
"Through trackless ways the soul of man is hurled,  
No sign upon the forehead of the skies,  
No beacon, and no chart  
Are given to him, and the inscrutable world  
But mocks his scars and fills his mouth with dust."

*And lies bore lies  
And lust bore lust,  
And the world was heavy with flowerless rods,  
And pride outran  
The strength of a man  
Who had set himself in the place of gods.*

#### IV

Soon was I then to gather bitter shame  
Of spirit; I had been most wildly proud —  
Yet in my pride had been  
Some little courage, formless as a cloud,  
Unpiloted save by a vagrant wind,  
But still an earnest of the bonds that tame  
The legionary hates, of sacred loves that lean  
From the high soul of man towards his kind.  
And all my grief  
Had been for those I watched go to and fro  
In uncompassioned woe  
Along that little span my unbelief  
Had fashioned in my vision as all life.  
Now even this so little virtue waned,  
For I became caught up into the strife  
That I had pitied, and my soul was stained  
At last by that most venomous despair,  
Self-pity.

I no longer was aware  
Of any will to heal the world's unrest,  
I suffered as it suffered, and I grew  
Troubled in all my daily trafficking,  
Not with the large heroic trouble known  
By proud adventurous men who would atone  
With their own passionate pity for the sting  
And anguish of a world of peril and snares,  
It was the trouble of a soul in thrall  
To mean despairs,  
Driven about a waste where neither fall  
Of words from lips of love, nor consolation  
Of grave eyes comforting, nor ministration  
Of hand or heart could pierce the deadly wall  
Of self – of self, – I was a living shame —  
A broken purpose. I had stood apart  
With pride rebellious and defiant heart,  
And now my pride had perished in the flame.  
I cried for succour as a little child  
Might supplicate whose days are undefiled, —  
For tutored pride and innocence are one.

*To the gloom has won  
A gleam of the sun  
And into the barren desolate ways  
A scent is blown  
As of meadows mown  
By cooling rivers in clover days.*

## V

I turned me from that place in humble wise,  
And fingers soft were laid upon mine eyes,  
And I beheld the fruitful earth, with store  
Of odorous treasure, full and golden grain,  
Ripe orchard bounty, slender stalks that bore  
Their flowered beauty with a meek content,  
The prosperous leaves that loved the sun and rain,  
Shy creatures unproved that came and went  
In garrulous joy among the fostering green.  
And, over all, the changes of the day  
And ordered year their mutable glory laid —  
Expectant winter soberly arrayed,  
The prudent diligent spring whose eyes have seen  
The beauty of the roses uncreate,  
Imperial June, magnificent, elate  
Beholding all the ripening loves that stray

Among her blossoms, and the golden time  
Of the full ear and bounty of the boughs, —  
And the great hills and solemn chanting seas  
And prodigal meadows, answering to the chime  
Of God's good year, and bearing on their brows  
The glory of processional mysteries  
From dawn to dawn, the woven leaves and light  
Of the high noon, the twilight secrecies,  
And the inscrutable wonder of the stars  
Flung out along the reaches of the night.

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