

Canto One

The Dream Twilight of the Ideal

ALL STILL was darkness dread and desolate;
There was no change nor any hope of change.
In this black dream which was a house of Void,
A walk to Nowhere in a land of Nought,
Ever they drifted without aim or goal;
Gloom led to worse gloom, depth to an emptier depth,
In some positive Non-being's purposeless Vast
Through formless wastes dumb and unknowable.
An ineffectual beam of suffering light
Through the despairing darkness dogged their steps
Like the remembrance of a glory lost;
Even while it grew, it seemed unreal there,
Yet haunted Nihil's chill stupendous realm,
Unquenchable, perpetual, lonely, null,
A pallid ghost of some dead eternity.
It was as if she must pay now her debt,
Her vain presumption to exist and think,
To some brilliant Maya that conceived her soul.
This most she must absolve with endless pangs,
Her deep original sin, the will to be
And the sin last, greatest, the spiritual pride,
That, made of dust, equalled itself with heaven,
Its scorn of the worm writhing in the mud,
Condemned ephemeral, born from Nature's dream,
Refusal of the transient creature's role,
The claim to be a living fire of God,
The will to be immortal and divine.
In that tremendous darkness heavy and bare
She atoned for all since the first act whence sprang
The error of the consciousness of Time,
The rending of the Inconscient's seal of sleep,

The primal and unpardoned revolt that broke
The peace and silence of the Nothingness
Which was before a seeming universe
Appeared in a vanity of imagined Space
And life arose engendering grief and pain:
A great Negation was the Real's face
Prohibiting the vain process of Time:
And when there is no world, no creature more,
When Time's intrusion has been blotted out,
It shall last, unbodied, saved from thought, at peace.
Accursed in what had been her godhead source,
Condemned to live for ever empty of bliss,
Her immortality her chastisement,
Her spirit, guilty of being, wandered doomed,
Moving for ever through eternal Night.
But Maya is a veil of the Absolute;
A Truth occult has made this mighty world:
The Eternal's wisdom and self-knowledge act
In ignorant Mind and in the body's steps.
The Inconscient is the Superconscient's sleep.
An unintelligible Intelligence
Invents creation's paradox profound;
Spiritual thought is crammed in Matter's forms,
Unseen it throws out a dumb energy
And works a miracle by a machine.
All here is a mystery of contraries:
Darkness a magic of self-hidden Light,
Suffering some secret rapture's tragic mask
And death an instrument of perpetual life.
Although Death walks beside us on Life's road,
A dim bystander at the body's start
And a last judgment on man's futile works,
Other is the riddle of its ambiguous face:
Death is a stair, a door, a stumbling stride
The soul must take to cross from birth to birth,
A grey defeat pregnant with victory,

A whip to lash us towards our deathless state.
The unconscious world is the spirit's self-made room,
Eternal Night shadow of eternal Day.
Night is not our beginning nor our end;
She is the dark Mother in whose womb we have hid
Safe from too swift a waking to world-pain.
We came to her from a supernal Light,
By Light we live and to the Light we go.
Here in this seat of Darkness mute and lone,
In the heart of everlasting Nothingness
Light conquered now even by that feeble beam:
Its faint infiltration drilled the blind deaf mass;
Almost it changed into a glimmering sight
That housed the phantom of an aureate Sun
Whose orb pupilled the eye of Nothingness.
A golden fire came in and burned Night's heart;
Her dusky mindlessness began to dream;
The Unconscious conscious grew, Night felt and thought.
Assailed in the sovereign emptiness of its reign
The intolerant Darkness paled and drew apart
Till only a few black remnants stained that Ray.
But on a failing edge of dumb lost space
Still a great dragon body sullenly loomed;
Adversary of the slow struggling Dawn
Defending its ground of tortured mystery,
It trailed its coils through the dead martyred air
And curving fled down a grey slope of Time.

There is a morning twilight of the gods;
Miraculous from sleep their forms arise
And God's long nights are justified by dawn.
There breaks a passion and splendour of new birth
And hue-winged visions stray across the lids,
Heaven's chanting heralds waken dim-eyed Space.
The dreaming deities look beyond the seen
And fashion in their thoughts the ideal worlds

Sprung from a limitless moment of desire
That once had lodged in some abysmal heart.
Passed was the heaviness of the eyeless dark
And all the sorrow of the night was dead:
Surprised by a blind joy with groping hands
Like one who wakes to find his dreams were true,
Into a happy misty twilit world
Where all ran after light and joy and love
She slipped; there far-off raptures drew more close
And deep anticipations of delight,
For ever eager to be grasped and held,
Were never grasped, yet breathed strange ecstasy.
A pearl-winged indistinctness fleeting swam,
An air that dared not suffer too much light.
Vague fields were there, vague pastures gleamed, vague trees,
Vague scenes dim-hearted in a drifting haze;
Vague cattle white roamed glimmering through the mist;
Vague spirits wandered with a bodiless cry,
Vague melodies touched the soul and fled pursued
Into harmonious distances unseized;
Forms subtly elusive and half-luminous powers
Wishing no goal for their unearthly course
Strayed happily through vague ideal lands,
Or floated without footing or their walk
Left steps of reverie on sweet memory's ground;
Or they paced to the mighty measure of their thoughts
Led by a low far chanting of the gods.
A ripple of gleaming wings crossed the far sky;
Birds like pale-bosomed imaginations flew
With low disturbing voices of desire,
And half-heard lowings drew the listening ear,
As if the Sun-god's brilliant kine were there
Hidden in mist and passing towards the sun.
These fugitive beings, these elusive shapes
Were all that claimed the eye and met the soul,
The natural inhabitants of that world.

But nothing there was fixed or stayed for long;
No mortal feet could rest upon that soil,
No breath of life lingered embodied there.
In that fine chaos joy fled dancing past
And beauty evaded settled line and form
And hid its sense in mysteries of hue;
Yet gladness ever repeated the same notes
And gave the sense of an enduring world;
There was a strange consistency of shapes,
And the same thoughts were constant passers-by
And all renewed unendingly its charm
Alluring ever the expectant heart
Like music that one always waits to hear,
Like the recurrence of a haunting rhyme.
One touched incessantly things never seized,
A skirt of worlds invisibly divine.
As if a trail of disappearing stars
There showered upon the floating atmosphere
Colours and lights and evanescent gleams
That called to follow into a magic heaven,
And in each cry that fainted on the ear
There was the voice of an unrealised bliss.
An adoration reigned in the yearning heart,
A spirit of purity, an elusive presence
Of faery beauty and ungrasped delight
Whose momentary and escaping thrill,
However unsubstantial to our flesh,
And brief even in imperishableness,
Much sweeter seemed than any rapture known
Earth or all-conquering heaven can ever give.
Heaven ever young and earth too firm and old
Delay the heart by immobility:
Their raptures of creation last too long,
Their bold formations are too absolute;
Carved by an anguish of divine endeavour
They stand up sculptured on the eternal hills,

Or quarried from the living rocks of God
Win immortality by perfect form.
They are too intimate with eternal things:
Vessels of infinite significances,
They are too clear, too great, too meaningful;
No mist or shadow soothes the vanquished sight,
No soft penumbra of incertitude.
These only touched a golden hem of bliss,
The gleaming shoulder of some godlike hope,
The flying feet of exquisite desires.
On a slow trembling brink between night and day
They shone like visitants from the morning star,
Satisfied beginnings of perfection, first
Tremulous imaginings of a heavenly world:
They mingle in a passion of pursuit,
Thrilled with a spray of joy too slight to tire.
All in this world was shadowed forth, not limned,
Like faces leaping on a fan of fire
Or shapes of wonder in a tinted blur,
Like fugitive landscapes painting silver mists.
Here vision fled back from the sight alarmed,
And sound sought refuge from the ear's surprise,
And all experience was a hasty joy.
The joys here snatched were half-forbidden things,
Timorous soul-bridals delicately veiled
As when a goddess' bosom dimly moves
To first desire and her white soul transfigured,
A glimmering Eden crossed by faery gleams,
Trembles to expectation's fiery wand,
But nothing is familiar yet with bliss.
All things in this fair realm were heavenly strange
In a fleeting gladness of untired delight,
In an insistency of magic change.
Past vanishing hedges, hurrying hints of fields,
Mid swift escaping lanes that fled her feet
Journeying she wished no end: as one through clouds

Travels upon a mountain ridge and hears
Arising to him out of hidden depths
Sound of invisible streams, she walked besieged
By the illusion of a mystic space,
A charm of bodiless touches felt and heard
A sweetness as of voices high and dim
Calling like travellers upon seeking winds
Melodiously with an alluring cry.
As if a music old yet ever new,
Moving suggestions on her heart-strings dwelt,
Thoughts that no habitation found, yet clung
With passionate repetition to her mind,
Desires that hurt not, happy only to live
Always the same and always unfulfilled
Sang in the breast like a celestial lyre.
Thus all could last yet nothing ever be.
In this beauty as of mind made visible,
Dressed in its rays of wonder Satyavan
Before her seemed the centre of its charm,
Head of her loveliness of longing dreams
And captain of the fancies of her soul.
Even the dreadful majesty of Death's face
And its sombre sadness could not darken nor slay
The intangible lustre of those fleeting skies.
The sombre Shadow sullen, implacable
Made beauty and laughter more imperative;
Enhanced by his grey, joy grew more bright and dear;
His dark contrast edging ideal sight
Deepened unuttered meanings to the heart;
Pain grew a trembling undertone of bliss
And transience immortality's floating hem,
A moment's robe in which she looked more fair,
Its antithesis sharpening her divinity.
A comrade of the Ray and Mist and Flame,
By a moon-bright face a brilliant moment drawn,
Almost she seemed a thought mid floating thoughts,

Seen hardly by a visionary mind
Amid the white inward musings of the soul.
Half-vanquished by the dream-happiness around,
Awhile she moved on an enchantment's soil,
But still remained possessor of her soul.
Above, her spirit in its mighty trance
Saw all, but lived for its transcendent task,
Immutable like a fixed eternal star.

END OF CANTO ONE