Canto Two

The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain

A silence sealed the irrevocable decree,
The word of Fate that fell from heavenly lips
Fixing a doom no power could ever reverse
Unless heaven’s will itself could change its course.
Or so it seemed: yet from the silence rose
One voice that questioned changeless destiny,
A will that strove against the immutable Will.
A mother’s heart had heard the fateful speech
That rang like a sanction to the call of death
And came like a chill close to life and hope.
Yet hope sank down like an extinguished fire.
She felt the leaden inevitable hand
Invade the secrecy of her guarded soul
And smite with sudden pain its still content
And the empire of her hard-won quietude.
Awhile she fell to the level of human mind,
A field of mortal grief and Nature’s law;
She shared, she bore the common lot of men
And felt what common hearts endure in Time.
Voicing earth’s question to the inscrutable power
The queen now turned to the still immobile seer:
Assailed by the discontent in Nature’s depths,
Partner in the agony of dumb driven things
And all the misery, all the ignorant cry,
Passionate like sorrow questioning heaven she spoke.
Lending her speech to the surface soul on earth
She uttered the suffering in the world’s dumb heart
And man’s revolt against his ignorant fate.
“O seer, in the earth’s strange twi-natured life
By what pitiless adverse Necessity
Or what cold freak of a Creator’s will,
By what random accident or governed Chance
That shaped a rule out of fortuitous steps,
Made destiny from an hour’s emotion, came
Into the unreadable mystery of Time
The direr mystery of grief and pain?
Is it thy God who made this cruel law?
Or some disastrous Power has marred his work
And he stands helpless to defend or save?
A fatal seed was sown in life’s false start
When evil twinned with good on earthly soil.
Then first appeared the malady of mind,
Its pang of thought, its quest for the aim of life.
It twisted into forms of good and ill
The frank simplicity of the animal’s acts;
It turned the straight path hewn by the body’s gods,
Followed the zigzag of the uncertain course
Of life that wanders seeking for its aim
In the pale starlight falling from thought’s skies,
Its guides the unsure idea, the wavering will.
Lost was the instinct’s safe identity
With the arrow-point of being’s inmost sight,
Marred the sure steps of Nature’s simple walk
And truth and freedom in the growing soul.
Out of some ageless innocence and peace,
Privilege of souls not yet betrayed to birth,
Cast down to suffer on this hard dangerous earth
Our life was born in pain and with a cry.
Although earth-nature welcomes heaven’s breath
Inspiring Matter with the will to live,
A thousand ills assail the mortal’s hours
And wear away the natural joy of life;
Our bodies are an engine cunningly made,
But for all its parts as cunningly are planned,
Contrived ingeniously with demon skill,
Its apt inevitable heritage
Of mortal danger and peculiar pain,
Its payment of the tax of Time and Fate,
Its way to suffer and its way to die.
This is the ransom of our high estate,
The sign and stamp of our humanity.
A grisly company of maladies
Come, licensed lodgers, into man’s bodily house,
Purveyors of death and torturers of life.
In the malignant hollows of the world,
In its subconscient cavern-passages
Ambushed they lie waiting their hour to leap,
Surrounding with danger the sieged city of life:
Admitted into the citadel of man’s days
They mine his force and maim or suddenly kill.
Ourselves within us lethal forces nurse;
We make of our own enemies our guests:
Out of their holes like beasts they creep and gnaw
The chords of the divine musician’s lyre
Till frayed and thin the music dies away
Or crashing snaps with a last tragic note.
All that we are is like a fort beset:
All that we strive to be alters like a dream
In the grey sleep of Matter’s ignorance.
Mind suffers lamed by the world’s disharmony
And the unloveliness of human things.
A treasure misspent or cheaply, fruitlessly sold
In the bazaar of a blind destiny,
A gift of priceless value from Time’s gods
Lost or mislaid in an uncaring world,
Life is a marvel missed, an art gone wry;
A seeker in a dark and obscure place,
An ill-armed warrior facing dreadful odds,
An imperfect worker given a baffling task,
An ignorant judge of problems Ignorance made,
Its heavenward flights reach closed and keyless gates,
Its glorious outbursts peter out in mire.
On Nature’s gifts to man a curse was laid:
All walks inarmed by its own opposites,
Error is the comrade of our mortal thought
And falsehood lurks in the deep bosom of truth,
Sin poisons with its vivid flowers of joy
Or leaves a red scar burnt across the soul;
Virtue is a grey bondage and a gaol.
At every step is laid for us a snare.
Alien to reason and the spirit’s light,
Our fount of action from a darkness wells;
In ignorance and nescience are our roots.
A growing register of calamities
Is the past’s account, the future’s book of Fate:
The centuries pile man’s follies and man’s crimes
Upon the countless crowd of Nature’s ills;
As if the world’s stone load was not enough,
A crop of miseries obstinately is sown
By his own hand in the furrows of the gods,
The vast increasing tragic harvest reaped
From old misdeeds buried by oblivious Time.
He walks by his own choice into Hell’s trap;
This mortal creature is his own worst foe.
His science is an artificer of doom;
He ransacks earth for means to harm his kind;
He slays his happiness and others’ good.
Nothing has he learned from Time and its history;
Even as of old in the raw youth of Time,
When Earth ignorant ran on the highways of Fate,
Old forms of evil cling to the world’s soul:
War making nought the sweet smiling calm of life,
Battle and rapine, ruin and massacre
Are still the fierce pastimes of man’s warring tribes;
An idiot hour destroys what centuries made,
His wanton rage or frenzied hate lays low
The beauty and greatness by his genius wrought
And the mighty output of a nation’s toil.
All he has achieved he drags to the precipice.
CANTO II: *The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain*

His grandeur he turns to an epic of doom and fall;
His littleness crawls content through squalor and mud,
He calls heaven’s retribution on his head
And wallows in his self-made misery.
A part author of the cosmic tragedy,
His will conspires with death and time and fate.
His brief appearance on the enigmed earth
Ever recurs but brings no high result
To this wanderer through the aeon-rings of God
That shut his life in their vast longevity.
His soul’s wide search and ever returning hopes
Pursue the useless orbit of their course
In a vain repetition of lost toils
Across a track of soon forgotten lives.
All is an episode in a meaningless tale.
Why is it all and wherefore are we here?
If to some being of eternal bliss
It is our spirit’s destiny to return
Or some still impersonal height of endless calm,
Since That we are and out of That we came,
Whence rose the strange and sterile interlude
Lasting in vain through interminable Time?
Who willed to form or feign a universe
In the cold and endless emptiness of Space?
Or if these beings must be and their brief lives,
What need had the soul of ignorance and tears?
Whence rose the call for sorrow and for pain?
Or all came helplessly without a cause?
What power forced the immortal spirit to birth?
The eternal witness once of eternity,
A deathless sojourner mid transient scenes,
He camps in life’s half-lit obscurity
Amid the debris of his thoughts and dreams.
Or who persuaded it to fall from bliss
And forfeit its immortal privilege?
Who laid on it the ceaseless will to live
A wanderer in this beautiful, sorrowful world,
And bear its load of joy and grief and love?
Or if no being watches the works of Time,
What hard impersonal Necessity
Compels the vain toil of brief living things?
A great Illusion then has built the stars.
But where then is the soul’s security,
Its poise in this circling of unreal suns?
Or else it is a wanderer from its home
Who strayed into a blind alley of Time and chance
And finds no issue from a meaningless world.
Or where begins and ends Illusion’s reign?
Perhaps the soul we feel is only a dream,
Eternal self a fiction sensed in trance.”

Then after a silence Narad made reply:
Tuning his lips to earthly sound he spoke,
And something now of the deep sense of fate
Weighted the fragile hints of mortal speech.
His forehead shone with vision solemnised,
Turned to a tablet of supernal thoughts
As if characters of an unwritten tongue
Had left in its breadth the inscriptions of the gods.
Bare in that light Time toiled, his unseen works
Detected; the broad-flung far-seeing schemes
Unfinished which his aeoned flight unrolls
Were mapped already in that world-wide look.
“Was then the sun a dream because there is night?
Hidden in the mortal’s heart the Eternal lives:
He lives secret in the chamber of thy soul,
A Light shines there nor pain nor grief can cross.
A darkness stands between thyself and him,
Thou canst not hear or feel the marvellous Guest,
Thou canst not see the beatific sun.
O queen, thy thought is a light of the Ignorance,
Its brilliant curtain hides from thee God’s face.
It illumes a world born from the Inconscience
But hides the Immortal’s meaning in the world.
Thy mind’s light hides from thee the Eternal’s thought,
Thy heart’s hopes hide from thee the Eternal’s will,
Earth’s joys shut from thee the Immortal’s bliss.
Thence rose the need of a dark intruding god,
The world’s dread teacher, the creator, pain.
Where Ignorance is, there suffering too must come;
Thy grief is a cry of darkness to the Light;
Pain was the first-born of the Inconscience
Which was thy body’s dumb original base;
Already slept there pain’s subconscient shape:
A shadow in a shadowy tenebrous womb,
Till life shall move, it waits to wake and be.
In one caul with joy came forth the dreadful Power.
In life’s breast it was born hiding its twin;
But pain came first, then only joy could be.
Pain ploughed the first hard ground of the world-drowse.
By pain a spirit started from the clod,
By pain Life stirred in the subliminal deep.
Interned, submerged, hidden in Matter’s trance
Awoke to itself the dreamer, sleeping Mind;
It made a visible realm out of its dreams,
It drew its shapes from the subconscient depths,
Then turned to look upon the world it had made.
By pain and joy, the bright and tenebrous twins,
The inanimate world perceived its sentient soul,
Else had the Inconscient never suffered change.
Pain is the hammer of the Gods to break
A dead resistance in the mortal’s heart,
His slow inertia as of living stone.
If the heart were not forced to want and weep,
His soul would have lain down content, at ease,
And never thought to exceed the human start
And never learned to climb towards the Sun.
This earth is full of labour, packed with pain;
Throes of an endless birth coerce her still;
The centuries end, the ages vainly pass
And yet the Godhead in her is not born.
The ancient Mother faces all with joy,
Calls for the ardent pang, the grandiose thrill;
For with pain and labour all creation comes.
This earth is full of the anguish of the gods;
Ever they travail driven by Time’s goad,
And strive to work out the eternal Will
And shape the life divine in mortal forms.
His will must be worked out in human breasts
Against the Evil that rises from the gulfs,
Against the world’s Ignorance and its obstinate strength,
Against the stumblings of man’s pervert will,
Against the deep folly of his human mind,
Against the blind reluctance of his heart.
The spirit is doomed to pain till man is free.
There is a clamour of battle, a tramp, a march:
A cry arises like a moaning sea,
A desperate laughter under the blows of death,
A doom of blood and sweat and toil and tears.
Men die that man may live and God be born.
An awful Silence watches tragic Time.
Pain is the hand of Nature sculpturing men
To greatness: an inspired labour chisels
With heavenly cruelty an unwilling mould.
Implacable in the passion of their will,
Lifting the hammers of titanic toil
The demiurges of the universe work;
They shape with giant strokes their own; their sons
Are marked with their enormous stamp of fire.
Although the shaping god’s tremendous touch
Is torture unbearable to mortal nerves,
The fiery spirit grows in strength within
And feels a joy in every titan pang.
He who would save himself lives bare and calm;
He who would save the race must share its pain:  
This he shall know who obeys that grandiose urge.  
The Great who came to save this suffering world  
And rescue out of Time’s shadow and the Law,  
Must pass beneath the yoke of grief and pain;  
They are caught by the Wheel that they had hoped to break,  
On their shoulders they must bear man’s load of fate.  
Heaven’s riches they bring, their sufferings count the price  
Or they pay the gift of knowledge with their lives.  
The Son of God born as the Son of man  
Has drunk the bitter cup, owned Godhead’s debt,  
The debt the Eternal owes to the fallen kind  
His will has bound to death and struggling life  
That yearns in vain for rest and endless peace.  
Now is the debt paid, wiped off the original score.  
The Eternal suffers in a human form,  
He has signed salvation’s testament with his blood:  
He has opened the doors of his undying peace.  
The Deity compensates the creature’s claim,  
The Creator bears the law of pain and death;  
A retribution smites the incarnate God.  
His love has paved the mortal’s road to Heaven:  
He has given his life and light to balance here  
The dark account of mortal ignorance.  
It is finished, the dread mysterious sacrifice,  
Offered by God’s martyred body for the world;  
Gethsemane and Calvary are his lot,  
He carries the cross on which man’s soul is nailed;  
His escort is the curses of the crowd;  
Insult and jeer are his right’s acknowledgment;  
Two thieves slain with him mock his mighty death.  
He has trod with bleeding brow the Saviour’s way.  
He who has found his identity with God  
Pays with the body’s death his soul’s vast light.  
His knowledge immortal triumphs by his death.  
Hewn, quartered on the scaffold as he falls,
His crucified voice proclaims, ‘I, I am God;’
‘Yes, all is God,’ peals back Heaven’s deathless call.
The seed of Godhead sleeps in mortal hearts,
The flower of Godhead grows on the world-tree:
All shall discover God in self and things.
But when God’s messenger comes to help the world
And lead the soul of earth to higher things,
He too must carry the yoke he came to unloose;
He too must bear the pang that he would heal:
Exempt and unafflicted by earth’s fate,
How shall he cure the ills he never felt?
He covers the world’s agony with his calm;
But though to the outward eye no sign appears
And peace is given to our torn human hearts,
The struggle is there and paid the unseen price;
The fire, the strife, the wrestle are within.
He carries the suffering world in his own breast;
Its sins weigh on his thoughts, its grief is his:
Earth’s ancient load lies heavy on his soul;
Night and its powers beleaguer his tardy steps,
The Titan adversary’s clutch he bears;
His march is a battle and a pilgrimage.
Life’s evil smites, he is stricken with the world’s pain:
A million wounds gape in his secret heart.
He journeys sleepless through an unending night;
Antagonist forces crowd across his path;
A siege, a combat is his inner life.
Even worse may be the cost, direr the pain:
His large identity and all-harbouring love
Shall bring the cosmic anguish into his depths,
The sorrow of all living things shall come
And knock at his doors and live within his house;
A dreadful cord of sympathy can tie
All suffering into his single grief and make
All agony in all the worlds his own.
He meets an ancient adversary Force,
He is lashed with the whips that tear the world’s worn heart;
The weeping of the centuries visits his eyes:
He wears the blood-glued fiery Centaur shirt,
The poison of the world has stained his throat.
In the market-place of Matter’s capital
Amidst the chafferings of the affair called life
He is tied to the stake of a perennial Fire;
He burns on an unseen original verge
That Matter may be turned to spirit stuff:
He is the victim in his own sacrifice.
The Immortal bound to earth’s mortality
Appearing and perishing on the roads of Time
Creates God’s moment by eternity’s beats.
He dies that the world may be new-born and live.
Even if he escapes the fiercest fires,
Even if the world breaks not in, a drowning sea,
Only by hard sacrifice is high heaven earned:
He must face the fight, the pang who would conquer Hell.
A dark concealed hostility is lodged
In the human depths, in the hidden heart of Time
That claims the right to change and mar God’s work.
A secret enmity ambushes the world’s march;
It leaves a mark on thought and speech and act:
It stamps stain and defect on all things done;
Till it is slain peace is forbidden on earth.
There is no visible foe, but the unseen
Is round us, forces intangible besiege,
Touches from alien realms, thoughts not our own
Overtake us and compel the erring heart;
Our lives are caught in an ambiguous net.
An adversary Force was born of old:
Invader of the life of mortal man,
It hides from him the straight immortal path.
A power came in to veil the eternal Light,
A power opposed to the eternal will
Diverts the messages of the infallible Word,
Contorts the contours of the cosmic plan:
A whisper lures to evil the human heart,
It seals up wisdom's eyes, the soul's regard,
It is the origin of our suffering here,
It binds earth to calamity and pain.
This all must conquer who would bring down God's peace.
This hidden foe lodged in the human breast
Man must overcome or miss his higher fate.
This is the inner war without escape.

"Hard is the world-redeemer's heavy task;
The world itself becomes his adversary,
those he would save are his antagonists:
This world is in love with its own ignorance,
Its darkness turns away from the saviour light,
It gives the cross in payment for the crown.
His work is a trickle of splendour in a long night;
He sees the long march of Time, the little won;
A few are saved, the rest strive on and fail:
A Sun has passed, on earth Night's shadow falls.
Yes, there are happy ways near to God's sun;
But few are they who tread the sunlit path;
Only the pure in soul can walk in light.
An exit is shown, a road of hard escape
from the sorrow and the darkness and the chain;
But how shall a few escaped release the world?
The human mass lingers beneath the yoke.
Escape, however high, redeems not life,
Life that is left behind on a fallen earth.
Escape cannot uplift the abandoned race
Or bring to it victory and the reign of God.
A greater power must come, a larger light.
Although Light grows on earth and Night recedes,
Yet till the evil is slain in its own home
And Light invades the world's inconscient base
And perished has the adversary Force,
He still must labour on, his work half done.
One yet may come armoured, invincible;
His will immobile meets the mobile hour;
The world’s blows cannot bend that victor head;
Calm and sure are his steps in the growing Night;
The goal recedes, he hurries not his pace,
He turns not to high voices in the night;
He asks no aid from the inferior gods;
His eyes are fixed on his immutable aim.
Man turns aside or chooses easier paths;
He keeps to the one high and difficult road
That sole can climb to the Eternal’s peaks;
The ineffable planes already have felt his tread;
He has made heaven and earth his instruments,
But the limits fall from him of earth and heaven;
Their law he transcends but uses as his means.
He has seized life’s hands, he has mastered his own heart.
The feints of Nature mislead not his sight,
Inflexible his look towards Truth’s far end;
Fate’s deaf resistance cannot break his will.
In the dreadful passages, the fatal paths,
Invulnerable his soul, his heart unslain,
He lives through the opposition of earth’s Powers
And Nature’s ambushes and the world’s attacks.
His spirit’s stature transcending pain and bliss,
He fronts evil and good with calm and equal eyes.
He too must grapple with the riddling Sphinx
And plunge into her long obscurity.
He has broken into the Inconscient’s depths
That veil themselves even from their own regard:
He has seen God’s slumber shape these magic worlds.
He has watched the dumb God fashioning Matter’s frame,
Dreaming the dreams of its unknowing sleep,
And watched the unconscious Force that built the stars.
He has learned the Inconscient’s workings and its law,
Its incoherent thoughts and rigid acts,
Its hazard wastes of impulse and idea,
The chaos of its mechanic frequencies,
Its random calls, its whispers falsely true,
Misleaders of the hooded listening soul.
All things come to its ear but nothing abides;
All rose from the silence, all goes back to its hush.
Its somnolence founded the universe,
Its obscure waking makes the world seem vain.
Arisen from Nothingness and towards Nothingness turned,
Its dark and potent nescience was earth’s start;
It is the waste stuff from which all was made;
Into its deeps creation can collapse.
Its opposition clogs the march of the soul,
It is the mother of our ignorance.
He must call light into its dark abysms,
Else never can Truth conquer Matter’s sleep
And all earth look into the eyes of God.
All things obscure his knowledge must relume,
All things perverse his power must unknot:
He must pass to the other shore of falsehood’s sea,
He must enter the world’s dark to bring there light.
The heart of evil must be bared to his eyes,
He must learn its cosmic dark necessity,
Its right and its dire roots in Nature’s soil.
He must know the thought that moves the demon act
And justifies the Titan’s erring pride
And the falsehood lurking in earth’s crooked dreams:
He must enter the eternity of Night
And know God’s darkness as he knows his Sun.
For this he must go down into the pit,
For this he must invade the dolorous Vasts.
Imperishable and wise and infinite,
He still must travel Hell the world to save.
Into the eternal Light he shall emerge
On borders of the meeting of all worlds;
There on the verge of Nature’s summit steps
CANTO II: The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain

The secret Law of each thing is fulfilled,
All contraries heal their long dissidence.
There meet and clasp the eternal opposites,
There pain becomes a violent fiery joy;
Evil turns back to its original good,
And sorrow lies upon the breasts of Bliss:
She has learned to weep glad tears of happiness;
Her gaze is charged with a wistful ecstasy.
Then shall be ended here the Law of Pain.
Earth shall be made a home of Heaven’s light,
A seer heaven-born shall lodge in human breasts;
The superconscient beam shall touch men’s eyes
And the truth-conscious world come down to earth
Invading Matter with the Spirit’s ray,
Awaking its silence to immortal thoughts,
Awaking the dumb heart to the living Word.
This mortal life shall house Eternity’s bliss,
The body’s self taste immortality.
Then shall the world-redeemer’s task be done.

“Till then must life carry its seed of death
And sorrow’s plaint be heard in the slow Night.
O mortal, bear this great world’s law of pain,
In thy hard passage through a suffering world
Lean for thy soul’s support on Heaven’s strength,
Turn towards high Truth, aspire to love and peace.
A little bliss is lent thee from above,
A touch divine upon thy human days.
Make of thy daily way a pilgrimage,
For through small joys and griefs thou mov’st towards God.
Haste not towards Godhead on a dangerous road,
Open not thy doorways to a nameless Power,
Climb not to Godhead by the Titan’s road.
Against the Law he pits his single will,
Across its way he throws his pride of might.
Heavenward he clambers on a stair of storms
Aspiring to live near the deathless sun.
He strives with a giant strength to wrest by force
From life and Nature the immortals’ right;
He takes by storm the world and fate and heaven.
He comes not to the high World-maker’s seat,
He waits not for the outstretched hand of God
To raise him out of his mortality.
All he would make his own, leave nothing free,
Stretching his small self to cope with the infinite.
Obstructing the gods’ open ways he makes
His own estate of the earth’s air and light;
A monopolist of the world-energy,
He dominates the life of common men.
His pain and others’ pain he makes his means:
On death and suffering he builds his throne.
In the hurry and clangour of his acts of might,
In a riot and excess of fame and shame,
By his magnitudes of hate and violence,
By the quaking of the world beneath his tread
He matches himself against the Eternal’s calm
And feels in himself the greatness of a god:
Power is his image of celestial self.
The Titan’s heart is a sea of fire and force;
He exults in the death of things and ruin and fall,
He feeds his strength with his own and others’ pain;
In the world’s pathos and passion he takes delight,
His pride, his might call for the struggle and pang.
He glories in the sufferings of the flesh
And covers the stigmata with the Stoic’s name.
His eyes blinded and visionless stare at the sun,
The seeker’s Sight receding from his heart
Can find no more the light of eternity;
He sees the beyond as an emptiness void of soul
And takes his night for a dark infinite.
His nature magnifies the unreal’s blank
And sees in Nought the sole reality:
He would stamp his single figure on the world,
Obsess the world’s rumours with his single name.
His moments centre the vast universe.
He sees his little self as very God.
His little ‘I’ has swallowed the whole world,
His ego has stretched into infinity.
His mind, a beat in original Nothingness,
Ciphers his thought on a slate of hourless Time.
He builds on a mighty vacancy of soul
A huge philosophy of Nothingness.
In him Nirvana lives and speaks and acts
Impossibly creating a universe.
An eternal zero is his formless self,
His spirit the void impersonal absolute.
Take not that stride, O growing soul of man;
Cast not thy self into that night of God.
The soul suffering is not eternity’s key,
Or ransom by sorrow heaven’s demand on life.
O mortal, bear, but ask not for the stroke,
Too soon will grief and anguish find thee out.
Too enormous is that venture for thy will;
Only in limits can man’s strength be safe;
Yet is infinity thy spirit’s goal;
Its bliss is there behind the world’s face of tears.
A power is in thee that thou knowest not;
Thou art a vessel of the imprisoned spark.
It seeks relief from Time’s envelopment,
And while thou shutst it in, the seal is pain:
Bliss is the Godhead’s crown, eternal, free,
Unburdened by life’s blind mystery of pain:
Pain is the signature of the Ignorance
Attesting the secret god denied by life:
Until life finds him pain can never end.
Calm is self’s victory overcoming fate.
Bear; thou shalt find at last thy road to bliss.
Bliss is the secret stuff of all that lives,
Even pain and grief are garbs of world-delight,  
It hides behind thy sorrow and thy cry.  
Because thy strength is a part and not God’s whole,  
Because afflicted by the little self  
Thy consciousness forgets to be divine  
As it walks in the vague penumbra of the flesh  
And cannot bear the world’s tremendous touch,  
Thou criest out and sayst that there is pain.  
Indifference, pain and joy, a triple disguise,  
Attire of the rapturous Dancer in the ways,  
Withhold from thee the body of God’s bliss.  
Thy spirit’s strength shall make thee one with God,  
Thy agony shall change to ecstasy,  
Indifference deepen into infinity’s calm  
And joy laugh nude on the peaks of the Absolute.

“O mortal who complainst of death and fate,  
Accuse none of the harms thyself hast called;  
This troubled world thou hast chosen for thy home,  
Thou art thyself the author of thy pain.  
Once in the immortal boundlessness of Self,  
In a vast of Truth and Consciousness and Light  
The soul looked out from its felicity.  
It felt the Spirit’s interminable bliss,  
It knew itself deathless, timeless, spaceless, one,  
It saw the Eternal, lived in the Infinite.  
Then, curious of a shadow thrown by Truth,  
It strained towards some otherness of self,  
It was drawn to an unknown Face peering through night.  
It sensed a negative infinity,  
A void supernal whose immense excess  
Imitating God and everlasting Time  
Offered a ground for Nature’s adverse birth  
And Matter’s rigid hard unconsciousness  
Harbouring the brilliance of a transient soul  
That lights up birth and death and ignorant life.
A Mind arose that stared at Nothingness
Till figures formed of what could never be;
It housed the contrary of all that is.
A Nought appeared as Being’s huge sealed cause,
Its dumb support in a blank infinite,
In whose abysm spirit must disappear:
A darkened Nature lived and held the seed
Of Spirit hidden and feigning not to be.
Eternal Consciousness became a freak
Of an unsouled almighty Inconscient
And, breathed no more as spirit’s native air,
Bliss was an incident of a mortal hour,
A stranger in the insentient universe.
As one drawn by the grandeur of the Void
The soul attracted leaned to the Abyss:
It longed for the adventure of Ignorance
And the marvel and surprise of the Unknown
And the endless possibility that lurked
In the womb of Chaos and in Nothing’s gulf
Or looked from the unfathomed eyes of Chance.
It tired of its unchanging happiness,
It turned away from immortality:
It was drawn to hazard’s call and danger’s charm,
It yearned to the pathos of grief, the drama of pain,
Perdition’s peril, the wounded bare escape,
The music of ruin and its glamour and crash,
The savour of pity and the gamble of love
And passion and the ambiguous face of Fate.
A world of hard endeavour and difficult toil,
And battle on extinction’s perilous verge,
A clash of forces, a vast incertitude,
The joy of creation out of Nothingness,
Strange meetings on the roads of Ignorance
And the companionship of half-known souls
Or the solitary greatness and lonely force
Of a separate being conquering its world,
Called it from its too safe eternity.
A huge descent began, a giant fall:
For what the spirit sees, creates a truth
And what the soul imagines is made a world.
A Thought that leaped from the Timeless can become,
Indicator of cosmic consequence
And the itinerary of the gods,
A cyclic movement in eternal Time.
Thus came, born from a blind tremendous choice,
This great perplexed and discontented world,
This haunt of Ignorance, this home of Pain:
There are pitched desire’s tents, grief’s headquarters.
A vast disguise conceals the Eternal’s bliss.

Then Aswapati answered to the seer:
“Is then the spirit ruled by an outward world?
O seer, is there no remedy within?
But what is Fate if not the spirit’s will
After long time fulfilled by cosmic Force?
I deemed a mighty Power had come with her;
Is not that Power the high compeer of Fate?”
But Narad answered covering truth with truth:
“O Aswapati, random seem the ways
Along whose banks your footsteps stray or run
In casual hours or moments of the gods,
Yet your least stumblings are foreseen above.
Infallibly the curves of life are drawn
Following the stream of Time through the unknown;
They are led by a clue the calm immortals keep.
This blazoned hieroglyph of prophet morns
A meaning more sublime in symbols writes
Than sealed Thought wakes to, but of this high script
How shall my voice convince the mind of earth?
Heaven’s wiser love rejects the mortal’s prayer;
Unblinded by the breath of his desire,
Uncloaked by the mists of fear and hope,
CANTO II: The Way of Fate and the Problem of Pain

It bends above the strife of love with death;  
It keeps for her her privilege of pain.  
A greatness in thy daughter’s soul resides  
That can transform herself and all around  
But must cross on stones of suffering to its goal.  
Although designed like a nectar cup of heaven,  
Of heavenly ether made she sought this air,  
She too must share the human need of grief  
And all her cause of joy transmute to pain.  
The mind of mortal man is led by words,  
His sight retires behind the walls of Thought  
And looks out only through half-opened doors.  
He cuts the boundless Truth into sky-strips  
And every strip he takes for all the heavens.  
He stares at infinite possibility  
And gives to the plastic Vast the name of Chance;  
He sees the long results of an all-wise Force  
Planning a sequence of steps in endless Time  
But in its links imagines a senseless chain  
Or the dead hand of cold Necessity;  
He answers not to the mystic Mother’s heart,  
Misses the ardent heavings of her breast  
And feels cold rigid limbs of lifeless Law.  
The will of the Timeless working out in Time  
In the free absolute steps of cosmic Truth  
He thinks a dead machine or unconscious Fate.  
A Magician’s formulas have made Matter’s laws  
And while they last, all things by them are bound;  
But the spirit’s consent is needed for each act  
And Freedom walks in the same pace with Law.  
All here can change if the Magician choose.  
If human will could be made one with God’s,  
If human thought could echo the thoughts of God,  
Man might be all-knowing and omnipotent;  
But now he walks in Nature’s doubtful ray.  
Yet can the mind of man receive God’s light,
The force of man can be driven by God’s force, 
Then is he a miracle doing miracles. 
For only so can he be Nature’s king. 
It is decreed and Satyavan must die; 
The hour is fixed, chosen the fatal stroke. 
What else shall be is written in her soul 
But till the hour reveals the fateful script, 
The writing waits illegible and mute. 
Fate is Truth working out in Ignorance. 
O King, thy fate is a transaction done 
At every hour between Nature and thy soul 
With God for its foreseeing arbiter. 
Fate is a balance drawn in Destiny’s book. 
Man can accept his fate, he can refuse. 
Even if the One maintains the unseen decree 
He writes thy refusal in thy credit page: 
For doom is not a close, a mystic seal. 
Arisen from the tragic crash of life, 
Arisen from the body’s torture and death, 
The spirit rises mightier by defeat; 
Its godlike wings grow wider with each fall. 
Its splendid failures sum to victory. 
O man, the events that meet thee on thy road, 
Though they smite thy body and soul with joy and grief, 
Are not thy fate, — they touch thee awhile and pass; 
Even death can cut not short thy spirit’s walk: 
Thy goal, the road thou choosest are thy fate. 
On the altar throwing thy thoughts, thy heart, thy works, 
Thy fate is a long sacrifice to the gods 
Till they have opened to thee thy secret self 
And made thee one with the indwelling God. 
O soul, intruder in Nature’s ignorance, 
Armed traveller to the unseen supernal heights, 
Thy spirit’s fate is a battle and ceaseless march 
Against invisible opponent Powers, 
A passage from Matter into timeless self.
Adventurer through blind unforeseeing Time,
A forced advance through a long line of lives,
It pushes its spearhead through the centuries.
Across the dust and mire of the earthly plain,
On many guarded lines and dangerous fronts,
In dire assaults, in wounded slow retreats,
Holding the ideal’s ringed and battered fort
Or fighting against odds in lonely posts,
Or camped in night around the bivouac’s fires
Awaiting the tardy trumpets of the dawn,
In hunger and in plenty and in pain,
Through peril and through triumph and through fall,
Through life’s green lanes and over her desert sands,
Up the bald moor, along the sunlit ridge,
In serried columns with a straggling rear
Led by its nomad vanguard’s signal fires,
Marches the army of the waylost god.
Then late the joy ineffable is felt,
Then he remembers his forgotten self;
He has refound the skies from which he fell.
At length his front’s indomitable line
Forces the last passes of the Ignorance:
Advancing beyond Nature’s last known bounds,
Reconnoitring the formidable unknown,
Beyond the landmarks of things visible,
It mounts through a miraculous upper air
Till climbing the mute summit of the world
He stands upon the splendour-peaks of God.
In vain thou mournst that Satyavan must die;
His death is a beginning of greater life,
Death is the spirit’s opportunity.
A vast intention has brought two souls close
And love and death conspire towards one great end.
For out of danger and pain heaven-bliss shall come,
Time’s unforeseen event, God’s secret plan.
This world was not built with random bricks of Chance,
A blind god is not destiny’s architect;
A conscious power has drawn the plan of life,
There is a meaning in each curve and line.
It is an architecture high and grand
By many named and nameless masons built
In which unseeing hands obey the Unseen,
And of its master-builders she is one.

“Queen, strive no more to change the secret will;
Time’s accidents are steps in its vast scheme.
Bring not thy brief and helpless human tears
Across the fathomless moments of a heart
That knows its single will and God’s as one:
It can embrace its hostile destiny;
It sits apart with grief and facing death,
Affronting adverse fate armed and alone.
In this enormous world standing apart
In the mightiness of her silent spirit’s will,
In the passion of her soul of sacrifice
Her lonely strength facing the universe,
Affronting fate, asks not man’s help nor god’s:
Sometimes one life is charged with earth’s destiny,
It cries not for succour from the time-bound powers.
Alone she is equal to her mighty task.
Intervene not in a strife too great for thee,
A struggle too deep for mortal thought to sound,
Its question to this Nature’s rigid bounds
When the soul fronts nude of garbs the infinite,
Its too vast theme of a lonely mortal will
Pacing the silence of eternity.
As a star, uncompanioned, moves in heaven
Unastonished by the immensities of Space,
Travelling infinity by its own light,
The great are strongest when they stand alone.
A God-given might of being is their force,
A ray from self’s solitude of light the guide;
The soul that can live alone with itself meets God;
Its lonely universe is their rendezvous.
A day may come when she must stand unhelped
On a dangerous brink of the world’s doom and hers,
Carrying the world’s future on her lonely breast,
Carrying the human hope in a heart left sole
To conquer or fail on a last desperate verge,
Alone with death and close to extinction’s edge.
Her single greatness in that last dire scene
Must cross alone a perilous bridge in Time
And reach an apex of world-destiny
Where all is won or all is lost for man.
In that tremendous silence lone and lost
Of a deciding hour in the world’s fate,
In her soul’s climbing beyond mortal time
When she stands sole with Death or sole with God
Alone with her self and death and destiny
As on some verge between Time and Timelessness
When being must end or life rebuild its base,
Alone she must conquer or alone must fall.
No human aid can reach her in that hour,
No armoured god stand shining at her side.
Cry not to heaven, for she alone can save.
For this the silent Force came missioned down;
In her the conscious Will took human shape:
She only can save herself and save the world.
O queen, stand back from that stupendous scene,
Come not between her and her hour of Fate.
Her hour must come and none can intervene:
Think not to turn her from her heaven-sent task,
Strive not to save her from her own high will.
Thou hast no place in that tremendous strife;
Thy love and longing are not arbiters there;
Leave the world’s fate and her to God’s sole guard.
Even if he seems to leave her to her lone strength,
Even though all falters and falls and sees an end
And the heart fails and only are death and night,
God-given her strength can battle against doom
Even on a brink where Death alone seems close
And no human strength can hinder or can help.
Think not to intercede with the hidden Will,
Intrude not twixt her spirit and its force
But leave her to her mighty self and Fate.”

He spoke and ceased and left the earthly scene.
Away from the strife and suffering on our globe,
He turned towards his far-off blissful home.
A brilliant arrow pointing straight to heaven,
The luminous body of the ethereal seer
Assailed the purple glory of the noon
And disappeared like a receding star
Vanishing into the light of the Unseen.
But still a cry was heard in the infinite,
And still to the listening soul on mortal earth
A high and far imperishable voice
Chanted the anthem of eternal love.

END OF CANTO TWO
END OF BOOK SIX