

Canto Eight

*The World of Falsehood, the Mother of Evil
and the Sons of Darkness*

THEN could he see the hidden heart of Night:
The labour of its stark unconsciousness
Revealed the endless terrible Inane.
A spiritless blank Infinity was there;
A Nature that denied the eternal Truth
In the vain braggart freedom of its thought
Hoped to abolish God and reign alone.
There was no sovereign Guest, no witness Light;
Unhelped it would create its own bleak world.
Its large blind eyes looked out on demon acts,
Its deaf ears heard the untruth its dumb lips spoke;
Its huge misguided fancy took vast shapes,
Its mindless sentience quivered with fierce conceits;
Engendering a brute principle of life
Evil and pain begot a monstrous soul.
The Anarchs of the formless depths arose,
Great Titan beings and demoniac powers,
World-egos racked with lust and thought and will,
Vast minds and lives without a spirit within:
Impatient architects of error's house,
Leaders of the cosmic ignorance and unrest
And sponsors of sorrow and mortality
Embodied the dark Ideas of the Abyss.
A shadow substance into emptiness came,
Dim forms were born in the unthinking Void
And eddies met and made an adverse Space
In whose black folds Being imagined Hell.
His eyes piercing the triple-plated gloom
Identified their sight with its blind stare:
Accustomed to the unnatural dark, they saw

Unreality made real and conscious Night.
A violent, fierce and formidable world,
An ancient womb of huge calamitous dreams,
Coiled like a larva in the obscurity
That keeps it from the spear-points of Heaven's stars.
It was the gate of a false Infinite,
An eternity of disastrous absolutes,
An immense negation of spiritual things.
All once self-luminous in the spirit's sphere
Turned now into their own dark contraries:
Being collapsed into a pointless void
That yet was a zero parent of the worlds;
Inconscience swallowing up the cosmic Mind
Produced a universe from its lethal sleep;
Bliss into black coma fallen, insensible,
Coiled back to itself and God's eternal joy
Through a false poignant figure of grief and pain
Still dolorously nailed upon a cross
Fixed in the soil of a dumb insentient world
Where birth was a pang and death an agony,
Lest all too soon should change again to bliss.
Thought sat, a priestess of Perversity,
On her black tripod of the triune Snake
Reading by opposite signs the eternal script,
A sorceress reversing life's God-frame.
In darkling aisles with evil eyes for lamps
And fatal voices chanting from the apse,
In strange infernal dim basilicas
Intoning the magic of the unholy Word,
The ominous profound Initiate
Performed the ritual of her Mysteries.
There suffering was Nature's daily food
Alluring to the anguished heart and flesh,
And torture was the formula of delight,
Pain mimicked the celestial ecstasy.
There Good, a faithless gardener of God,

Watered with virtue the world's upas-tree
And, careful of the outward word and act,
Engrafted his hypocrite blooms on native ill.
All high things served their nether opposite:
The forms of Gods sustained a demon cult;
Heaven's face became a mask and snare of Hell.
There in the heart of vain phenomenon,
In an enormous action's writhen core
He saw a Shape illimitable and vague
Sitting on Death who swallows all things born.
A chill fixed face with dire and motionless eyes,
Her dreadful trident in her shadowy hand
Outstretched, she pierced all creatures with one fate.

When nothing was save Matter without soul
And a spiritless hollow was the heart of Time,
Then Life first touched the insensible Abyss;
Awaking the stark Void to hope and grief
Her pallid beam smote the unfathomed Night
In which God hid himself from his own view.
In all things she sought their slumbering mystic truth,
The unspoken Word that inspires unconscious forms;
She groped in his deeps for an invisible Law,
Fumbled in the dim subconscious for his mind
And strove to find a way for spirit to be.
But from the Night another answer came.
A seed was in that nether matrix cast,
A dumb unprobed husk of perverted truth,
A cell of an insentient infinite.
A monstrous birth prepared its cosmic form
In Nature's titan embryo, Ignorance.
Then in a fatal and stupendous hour
Something that sprang from the stark Inconscient's sleep
Unwillingly begotten by the mute Void,
Lifted its ominous head against the stars;
Overshadowing earth with its huge body of Doom

It chilled the heavens with the menace of a face.
A nameless Power, a shadowy Will arose
Immense and alien to our universe.
In the inconceivable Purpose none can gauge
A vast Non-Being robed itself with shape,
The boundless Nescience of the unconscious depths
Covered eternity with nothingness.
A seeking Mind replaced the seeing Soul:
Life grew into a huge and hungry death,
The Spirit's bliss was changed to cosmic pain.
Assuring God's self-cowled neutrality
A mighty opposition conquered Space.
A sovereign ruling falsehood, death and grief,
It pressed its fierce hegemony on the earth;
Disharmonising the original style
Of the architecture of her fate's design,
It falsified the primal cosmic Will
And bound to struggle and dread vicissitudes
The long slow process of the patient Power.
Implanting error in the stuff of things
It made an Ignorance of the all-wise Law;
It baffled the sure touch of life's hid sense,
Kept dumb the intuitive guide in Matter's sleep,
Deformed the insect's instinct and the brute's,
Disfigured man's thought-born humanity.
A shadow fell across the simple Ray:
Obscured was the Truth-light in the cavern heart
That burns unwitnessed in the altar crypt
Behind the still velamen's secrecy
Companioning the Godhead of the shrine.
Thus was the dire antagonist Energy born
Who mimes the eternal Mother's mighty shape
And mocks her luminous infinity
With a grey distorted silhouette in the Night.
Arresting the passion of the climbing soul,
She forced on life a slow and faltering pace;

Her hand's deflecting and retarding weight
Is laid on the mystic evolution's curve:
The tortuous line of her deceiving mind
The Gods see not and man is impotent;
Oppressing the God-spark within the soul
She forces back to the beast the human fall.
Yet in her formidable instinctive mind
She feels the One grow in the heart of Time
And sees the Immortal shine through the human mould.
Alarmed for her rule and full of fear and rage
She prowls around each light that gleams through the dark
Casting its ray from the spirit's lonely tent,
Hoping to enter with fierce stealthy tread
And in the cradle slay the divine Child.
Incalculable are her strength and ruse;
Her touch is a fascination and a death;
She kills her victim with his own delight;
Even Good she makes a hook to drag to Hell.
For her the world runs to its agony.
Often the pilgrim on the Eternal's road
Ill-lit from clouds by the pale moon of Mind,
Or in devious byways wandering alone,
Or lost in deserts where no path is seen,
Falls overpowered by her lion leap,
A conquered captive under her dreadful paws.
Intoxicated by a burning breath
And amorous grown of a destroying mouth,
Once a companion of the sacred Fire,
The mortal perishes to God and Light,
An Adversary governs heart and brain,
A Nature hostile to the Mother-Force.
The self of life yields up its instruments
To Titan and demoniac agencies
That aggrandise earth-nature and disframe:
A cowed fifth-columnist is now thought's guide;
His subtle defeatist murmur slays the faith

And, lodged in the breast or whispering from outside,
 A lying inspiration fell and dark
 A new order substitutes for the divine.
 A silence falls upon the spirit's heights,
 From the veiled sanctuary the God retires,
 Empty and cold is the chamber of the Bride;
 The golden Nimbus now is seen no more,
 No longer burns the white spiritual ray
 And hushed for ever is the secret Voice.
 Then by the Angel of the Vigil Tower
 A name is struck from the recording book;
 A flame that sang in Heaven sinks quenched and mute;
 In ruin ends the epic of a soul.
 This is the tragedy of the inner death
 When forfeited is the divine element
 And only a mind and body live to die.

For terrible agencies the Spirit allows
 And there are subtle and enormous Powers
 That shield themselves with the covering Ignorance.
 Offspring of the gulfs, agents of the shadowy Force,
 Haters of light, intolerant of peace,
 Aping to the thought the shining Friend and Guide,
 Opposing in the heart the eternal Will,
 They veil the occult uplifting Harmonist.
 His wisdom's oracles are made our bonds;
 The doors of God they have locked with keys of creed
 And shut out by the Law his tireless Grace.
 Along all Nature's lines they have set their posts
 And intercept the caravans of Light;
 Wherever the Gods act, they intervene.
 A yoke is laid upon the world's dim heart;
 Masked are its beats from the supernal Bliss,
 And the closed peripheries of brilliant Mind
 Block the fine entries of celestial Fire.
 Always the dark Adventurers seem to win;

Nature they fill with evil's institutes,
Turn into defeats the victories of Truth,
Proclaim as falsehoods the eternal laws,
And load the dice of Doom with wizard lies;
The world's shrines they have occupied, usurped its thrones.
In scorn of the dwindling chances of the Gods
They claim creation as their conquered fief
And crown themselves the iron Lords of Time.
Adepts of the illusion and the mask,
The artificers of Nature's fall and pain
Have built their altars of triumphant Night
In the clay temple of terrestrial life.
In the vacant precincts of the sacred Fire,
In front of the reredos in the mystic rite
Facing the dim velamen none can pierce,
Intones his solemn hymn the mitred priest
Invoking their dreadful presence in his breast:
Attributing to them the awful Name
He chants the syllables of the magic text
And summons the unseen communion's act,
While twixt the incense and the muttered prayer
All the fierce bale with which the world is racked
Is mixed in the foaming chalice of man's heart
And poured to them like sacramental wine.
Assuming names divine they guide and rule.
Opponents of the Highest they have come
Out of their world of soulless thought and power
To serve by enmity the cosmic scheme.
Night is their refuge and strategic base.
Against the sword of Flame, the luminous Eye,
Bastioned they live in massive forts of gloom,
Calm and secure in sunless privacy:
No wandering ray of Heaven can enter there.
Armoured, protected by their lethal masks,
As in a studio of creative Death
The giant sons of Darkness sit and plan

The drama of the earth, their tragic stage.
All who would raise the fallen world must come
Under the dangerous arches of their power;
For even the radiant children of the gods
To darken their privilege is and dreadful right.
None can reach heaven who has not passed through hell.

 This too the traveller of the worlds must dare.
A warrior in the dateless duel's strife,
He entered into dumb despairing Night
Challenging the darkness with his luminous soul.
Alarming with his steps the threshold gloom
He came into a fierce and dolorous realm
Peopled by souls who never had tasted bliss;
Ignorant like men born blind who know not light,
They could equate worst ill with highest good,
Virtue was to their eyes a face of sin
And evil and misery were their natural state.
A dire administration's penal code
Making of grief and pain the common law,
Decreeing universal joylessness
Had changed life into a stoic sacrament
And torture into a daily festival.
An act was passed to chastise happiness;
Laughter and pleasure were banned as deadly sins:
A questionless mind was ranked as wise content,
A dull heart's silent apathy as peace:
Sleep was not there, torpor was the sole rest,
Death came but neither respite gave nor end;
Always the soul lived on and suffered more.
Ever he deeper probed that kingdom of pain;
Around him grew the terror of a world
Of agony followed by worse agony,
And in the terror a great wicked joy
Glad of one's own and others' calamity.
There thought and life were a long punishment,

The breath a burden and all hope a scourge,
The body a field of torment, a massed unease;
Repose was a waiting between pang and pang.
This was the law of things none dreamed to change:
A hard sombre heart, a harsh unsmiling mind
Rejected happiness like a cloying sweet;
Tranquillity was a tedium and ennui:
Only by suffering life grew colourful;
It needed the spice of pain, the salt of tears.
If one could cease to be, all would be well;
Else only fierce sensations gave some zest:
A fury of jealousy burning the gnawed heart,
The sting of murderous spite and hate and lust,
The whisper that lures to the pit and treachery's stroke
Threw vivid spots on the dull aching hours.
To watch the drama of infelicity,
The writhing of creatures under the harrow of doom
And sorrow's tragic gaze into the night
And horror and the hammering heart of fear
Were the ingredients in Time's heavy cup
That pleased and helped to enjoy its bitter taste.
Of such fierce stuff was made up life's long hell:
These were the threads of the dark spider's-web
In which the soul was caught, quivering and rapt;
This was religion, this was Nature's rule.
In a fell chapel of iniquity
To worship a black pitiless image of Power
Kneeling one must cross hard-hearted stony courts,
A pavement like a floor of evil fate.
Each stone was a keen edge of ruthless force
And glued with the chilled blood from tortured breasts;
The dry gnarled trees stood up like dying men
Stiffened into a pose of agony,
And from each window peered an ominous priest
Chanting *Te Deums* for slaughter's crowning grace,
Uprooted cities, blasted human homes,
Burned writhen bodies, the bombshell's massacre.

“Our enemies are fallen, are fallen,” they sang,
“All who once stayed our will are smitten and dead;
How great we are, how merciful art Thou.”
Thus thought they to reach God’s impassive throne
And Him command whom all their acts opposed,
Magnifying their deeds to touch his skies,
And make him an accomplice of their crimes.
There no relenting pity could have place,
But ruthless strength and iron moods had sway,
A dateless sovereignty of terror and gloom:
This took the figure of a darkened God
Revered by the racked wretchedness he had made,
Who held in thrall a miserable world,
And helpless hearts nailed to unceasing woe
Adored the feet that trampled them into mire.
It was a world of sorrow and of hate,
Sorrow with hatred for its lonely joy,
Hatred with others’ sorrow as its feast;
A bitter rictus curled the suffering mouth;
A tragic cruelty saw its ominous chance.
Hate was the black archangel of that realm;
It glowed, a sombre jewel in the heart
Burning the soul with its malignant rays,
And wallowed in its fell abysm of might.
These passions even objects seemed to exude, —
For mind overflowed into the inanimate
That answered with the wickedness it received, —
Against their users used malignant powers,
Hurt without hands and strangely, suddenly slew,
Appointed as instruments of an unseen doom.
Or they made themselves a fateful prison wall
Where men condemned wake through the creeping hours
Counted by the tollings of an ominous bell.
An evil environment worsened evil souls:
All things were conscious there and all perverse.
In this infernal realm he dared to press
Even into its deepest pit and darkest core,

Perturbed its tenebrous base, dared to contest
Its ancient privileged right and absolute force:
In Night he plunged to know her dreadful heart,
In Hell he sought the root and cause of Hell.
Its anguished gulfs opened in his own breast;
He listened to clamours of its crowded pain,
The heart-beats of its fatal loneliness.
Above was a chill deaf eternity.
In vague tremendous passages of Doom
He heard the goblin Voice that guides to slay,
And faced the enchantments of the demon Sign,
And traversed the ambush of the opponent Snake.
In menacing tracts, in tortured solitudes
Companionless he roamed through desolate ways
Where the red Wolf waits by the fordless stream
And Death's black eagles scream to the precipice,
And met the hounds of bale who hunt men's hearts
Baying across the veldts of Destiny,
In footless battlefields of the Abyss
Fought shadowy combats in mute eyeless depths,
Assaults of Hell endured and Titan strokes
And bore the fierce inner wounds that are slow to heal.
A prisoner of a hooded magic Force,
Captured and trailed in Falsehood's lethal net
And often strangled in the noose of grief,
Or cast in the grim morass of swallowing doubt,
Or shut into pits of error and despair,
He drank her poison draughts till none was left.
In a world where neither hope nor joy could come
The ordeal he suffered of evil's absolute reign,
Yet kept intact his spirit's radiant truth.
Incapable of motion or of force,
In Matter's blank denial gaoled and blind,
Pinned to the black inertia of our base
He treasured between his hands his flickering soul.
His being ventured into mindless Void,
Intolerant gulfs that knew not thought nor sense;

Thought ceased, sense failed, his soul still saw and knew.
In atomic parcellings of the Infinite
Near to the dumb beginnings of lost Self,
He felt the curious small futility
Of the creation of material things.
Or, stifled in the Inconscient's hollow dusk,
He sounded the mystery dark and bottomless
Of the enormous and unmeaning deeps
Whence struggling life in a dead universe rose.
There in the stark identity lost by mind
He felt the sealed sense of the insensible world
And a mute wisdom in the unknowing Night.
Into the abysmal secrecy he came
Where darkness peers from her mattress, grey and nude,
And stood on the last locked subconscious's floor
Where Being slept unconscious of its thoughts
And built the world not knowing what it built.
There waiting its hour the future lay unknown,
There is the record of the vanished stars.
There in the slumber of the cosmic Will
He saw the secret key of Nature's change.
A light was with him, an invisible hand
Was laid upon the error and the pain
Till it became a quivering ecstasy,
The shock of sweetness of an arm's embrace.
He saw in Night the Eternal's shadowy veil,
Knew death for a cellar of the house of life,
In destruction felt creation's hasty pace,
Knew loss as the price of a celestial gain
And hell as a short cut to heaven's gates.
Then in Illusion's occult factory
And in the Inconscient's magic printing-house
Torn were the formats of the primal Night
And shattered the stereotypes of Ignorance.
Alive, breathing a deep spiritual breath,
Nature expunged her stiff mechanical code
And the articles of the bound soul's contract,

Falsehood gave back to Truth her tortured shape.
Annulled were the tables of the law of Pain,
And in their place grew luminous characters.
The skilful Penman's unseen finger wrote
His swift intuitive calligraphy;
Earth's forms were made his divine documents,
The wisdom embodied mind could not reveal,
Inconscience chased from the world's voiceless breast;
Transfigured were the fixed schemes of reasoning Thought.
Arousing consciousness in things inert,
He imposed upon dark atom and dumb mass
The diamond script of the Imperishable,
Inscribed on the dim heart of fallen things
A paean-song of the free Infinite
And the Name, foundation of eternity,
And traced on the awake exultant cells
In the ideographs of the Ineffable
The lyric of the love that waits through Time
And the mystic volume of the Book of Bliss
And the message of the superconscient Fire.
Then life beat pure in the corporeal frame;
The infernal Gleam died and could slay no more.
Hell split across its huge abrupt façade
As if a magic building were undone,
Night opened and vanished like a gulf of dream.
Into being's gap scooped out as empty Space
In which she had filled the place of absent God,
There poured a wide intimate and blissful Dawn;
Healed were all things that Time's torn heart had made
And sorrow could live no more in Nature's breast:
Division ceased to be, for God was there.
The soul lit the conscious body with its ray,
Matter and spirit mingled and were one.

END OF CANTO EIGHT