The Rishi

King Manu in the former ages of the world, when the Arctic continent still subsisted, seeks knowledge from the Rishi of the Pole, who after long baffling him with conflicting side-lights of the knowledge, reveals to him what it chiefly concerns man to know.

MANU

Rishi who trance-held on the mountains old
Art slumbering, void
Of sense or motion, for in the spirit’s hold
Of unalloyed
Immortal bliss thou dreamst protected! Deep
Let my voice glide
Into thy dumb retreat and break thy sleep
Abysmal. Hear!
The frozen snows that heap thy giant bed
Ice-cold and clear,
The chill and desert heavens above thee spread
Vast, austere,
Are not so sharp but that thy warm limbs brook
Their bitter breath,
Are not so wide as thy immense outlook
On life and death:
Their vacancy thy silent mind and bright
Outmeasureth.
But ours are blindly active and thy light
We have forgone.

RISHI

Who art thou, warrior arméd gloriously
Like the sun?
Thy gait is as an empire and thine eye
Dominion.
MANU
King Manu, of the Aryan peoples lord,
   Greets thee, Sage.

RISHI
I know thee, King, earth to whose sleepless sword
   Was heritage.
The high Sun’s distant glories gave thee forth
   On being’s edge:
Where the slow skies of the auroral North
   Lead in the morn
And flaming dawns for ever on heaven’s verge
   Wheel and turn,
Thundering remote the clamorous Arctic surge
   Saw thee born.
There ’twas thy lot these later Fates to build,
   This race of man
New-fashion. O watcher with the mountains wild,
   The icy plain,
Thee I too, asleep, have watched, both when the Pole
   Was brightening wan
And when like a wild beast the darkness stole
   Prowling and slow
Alarming with its silent march the soul.
   O King, I know
Thy purpose; for the vacant ages roll
   Since man below
Conversed with God in friendship. Thou, reborn
   For men perplexed,
Seekest in this dim aeon and forlorn
   With evils vexed
The vanished light. For like this Arctic land
   Death has annexed
To sleep, our being’s summits cold and grand
   Where God abides,
Repel the tread of thought. I too, O King,
In winds and tides
Have sought Him, and in armies thundering,
   And where Death strides
Over whole nations. Action, thought and peace
   Were questioned, sleep,
And waking, but I had no joy of these,
   Nor ponderings deep,
And pity was not sweet enough, nor good
   My will could keep.
Often I found Him for a moment, stood
   Astonished, then
It fell from me. I could not hold the bliss,
   The force for men,
My brothers. Beauty ceased my heart to please,
   Brightness in vain
Recalled the vision of the light that glows
   Suns behind:
I hated the rich fragrance of the rose;
   Weary and blind,
I tired of the suns and stars; then came
   With broken mind
To heal me of the rash devouring flame,
   The dull disease,
And sojourned with this mountain’s summits bleak,
   These frozen seas.
King, the blind dazzling snows have made me meek,
   Cooled my unease.
Pride could not follow, nor the restless will
   Come and go;
My mind within grew holy, calm and still
   Like the snow.

MANU
O thou who wast with chariots formidable
   And with the bow!
Voiceless and white the cold unchanging hill,
Has it then
A mightier presence, deeper mysteries
   Than human men?
The warm low hum of crowds, towns, villages,
   The sun and rain,
The village maidens to the water bound,
   The happy herds,
The fluting of the shepherd lads, the sound
   Myriad of birds,
Speak these not clearer to the heart, convey
   More subtle words?
Here is but great dumb night, an awful day
   Inert and dead.

RISHI
The many’s voices fill the listening ear,
   Distract the head:
The One is silence; on the snows we hear
   Silence tread.

MANU
What hast thou garnered from the crags that lour,
   The icy field?

RISHI
O King, I spurned this body’s death; a Power
   There was, concealed,
That raised me. Rescued from the pleasant bars
   Our longings build,
My wingèd soul went up above the stars
   Questing for God.
MANU
Oh, didst thou meet Him then? in what bright field
Upon thy road?

RISHI
I asked the heavenly wanderers as they wheeled
For His abode.

MANU
Could glorious Saturn and his rings of hue
Direct thy flight?

RISHI
Sun could not tell, nor any planet knew
Its source of light,
Nor could I glean that knowledge though I paced
The world’s beyond
And into outer nothingness have gazed.
Time’s narrow sound
I crossed, the termless flood where on the Snake
One slumbers throned,
Attempted. But the ages from Him break
Blindly and Space
Forgets its origin. Then I returned
Where luminous blaze
Deathless and ageless in their ease unearned
The ethereal race.

MANU
Did the gods tell thee? Has Varuna seen
The high God’s face?
RISHI
How shall they tell of Him who marvel at sin
   And smile at grief?

MANU
Did He not send His blissful Angels down
   For thy relief?

RISHI
The Angels know Him not, who fear His frown,
   Have fixed belief.

MANU
Is there no heaven of eternal light
   Where He is found?

RISHI
The heavens of the Three have beings bright
   Their portals round,
And I have journeyed to those regions blest,
   Those hills renowned.
In Vishnu's house where wide Love builds his nest,
   My feet have stood.

MANU
Is he not That, the blue-winged Dove of peace,
   Father of Good?

RISHI
Nor Brahma, though the suns and hills and seas
   Are called his brood.
MANU
Is God a dream then? are the heavenly coasts
Visions vain?

RISHI
I came to Shiva’s roof; the flitting ghosts
Compelled me in.

MANU
Is He then God whom the forsaken seek,
Things of sin?

RISHI
He sat on being’s summit grand, a peak
Immense of fire.

MANU
Knows He the secret of release from tears
And from desire?

RISHI
His voice is the last murmur silence hears,
Tranquil and dire.

MANU
The silence calls us then and shall enclose?

RISHI
Our true abode
Is here and in the pleasant house He chose
To harbour God.
MANU
In vain thou hast travelled the unwonted stars
     And the void hast trod!

RISHI
King, not in vain. I knew the tedious bars
     That I had fled,
To be His arms whom I have sought; I saw
     How earth was made
Out of His being; I perceived the Law,
     The Truth, the Vast,
From which we came and which we are; I heard
     The ages past
Whisper their history, and I knew the Word
     That forth was cast
Into the unformed potency of things
     To build the suns.
Through endless Space and on Time’s iron wings
     A rhythm runs
Our lives pursue, and till the strain’s complete
     That now so moans
And falters, we upon this greenness meet,
     That measure tread.

MANU
Is earth His seat? this body His poor hold
     Infirmly made?

RISHI
I flung off matter like a robe grown old;
     Matter was dead.
MANU
Sages have told of vital force behind:
   It is God then?

RISHI
The vital spirits move but as a wind
   Within men.

MANU
Mind then is lord that like a sovereign sways
   Delight and pain?

RISHI
Mind is His wax to write and, written, rase
   Form and name.

MANU
Is Thought not He who has immortal eyes
   Time cannot dim?

RISHI
Higher, O King, the still voice bade me rise
   Than thought’s clear dream.
Deep in the luminous secrecy, the mute
   Profound of things,
Where murmurs never sound of harp or lute
   And no voice sings,
Light is not, nor our darkness, nor these bright
   Thunderings,
In the deep steady voiceless core of white
   And burning bliss,
The sweet vast centre and the cave divine
   Called Paradise,
He dwells within us all who dwells not in
Aught that is.

**MANU**

Rishi, thy thoughts are like the blazing sun
Eye cannot face.
How shall our souls on that bright awful One
Hope even to gaze
Who lights the world from His eternity
With a few rays?

**RISHI**

Dare on thyself to look, thyself art He,
O Aryan, then.
There is no thou nor I, beasts of the field,
Nor birds, nor men,
But flickerings on a many-sided shield
Pass, or remain,
And this is winged and that with poisonous tongue
Hissing coils.
We love ourselves and hate ourselves, are wrung
With woes and toils
To slay ourselves or from ourselves to win
Shadowy spoils.
And through it all, the rumour and the din,
Voices roam,
Voices of harps, voices of rolling seas,
That rarely come
And to our inborn old affinities
Call us home.
Shadows upon the many-sided Mind
Arrive and go,
Shadows that shadows see; the vain pomps wind
Above, below,
While in their hearts the single mighty God
Whom none can know,
Guiding the mimic squadrons with His nod
Watches it all —
Like transient shapes that sweep with half-guessed truth
A luminous wall.

MANU
Alas! is life then vain? Our gorgeous youth
Lithe and tall,
Our sweet fair women with their tender eyes
Outshining stars,
The mighty meditations of the wise,
The grandiose wars,
The blood, the fiery strife, the clenched dead hands,
The circle sparse,
The various labour in a hundred lands,
Are all these shows
To please some audience cold? as in a vase
Lily and rose,
Mixed snow and crimson, for a moment blaze
Till someone throws
The withered petals in some outer dust,
Heeding not, —
The virtuous man made one with the unjust,
Is this our lot?

RISHI
O King, sight is not vain, nor any sound.
Weeds that float
Upon a puddle and the majestic round
Of the suns
Are thoughts eternal, — what man loves to laud
And what he shuns;
Through glorious things and base the wheel of God
For ever runs.
O King, no thought is vain; our very dreams
Substantial are;
The light we see in fancy, yonder gleams
In the star.

**MANU**

Rishi, are we both dreams and real? the near
Even as the far?

**RISHI**

Dreams are we not, O King, but see dreams, fear
Therefore and strive.
Like poets in a wondrous world of thought
Always we live,
Whose shapes from out ourselves to being brought
Abide and thrive.
The poet from his vast and labouring mind
Brings brilliant out
A living world; forth into space they wind,
The shining rout,
And hate and love, and laugh and weep, enjoy,
Fight and shout,
King, lord and beggar, tender girl and boy,
Foemen, friends;
So to His creatures God's poetic mind
A substance lends.
The Poet with dazzling inspiration blind,
Until it ends,
Forgets Himself and lives in what He forms;
For ever His soul
Through chaos like a wind creating storms,
Till the stars roll
Through ordered space and the green lands arise,
The snowy Pole,
Ocean and this great heaven full of eyes,
And sweet sounds heard,
Man with his wondrous soul of hate and love,
And beast and bird,—
Yes, He creates the worlds and heaven above
   With a single word;
And these things being Himself are real, yet
   Are they like dreams,
For He awakes to self He could forget
   In what He seems.
Yet, King, deem nothing vain: through many veils
   This Spirit gleams.
The dreams of God are truths and He prevails.
   Then all His time
Cherish thyself, O King, and cherish men,
   Anchored in Him.

MANU
Upon the silence of the sapphire main
   Waves that sublime
Rise at His word and when that fiat’s stilled
   Are hushed again,
So is it, Rishi, with the Spirit concealed,
   Things and men?

RISHI
Hear then the truth. Behind this visible world
   The eyes see plain,
Another stands, and in its folds are curled
   Our waking dreams.
Dream is more real, which, while here we wake,
   Unreal seems.
From that our mortal life and thoughts we take.
   Its fugitive gleams
Are here made firm and solid; there they float
   In a magic haze,
Melody swelling note on absolute note,
   A lyric maze,
Beauty on beauty heaped pell-mell to chain
   The enchanted gaze,
Thought upon mighty thought with grandiose strain
   Weaving the stars.
This is that world of dream from which our race
   Came; by these bars
Of body now enchained, with laggard pace,
   Borne down with cares,
A little of that rapture to express
   We labour hard,
A little of that beauty, music, thought
   With toil prepared;
And if a single strain is clearly caught,
   Then our reward
Is great on earth, and in the world that floats
   Lingering awhile
We hear the fullness and the jarring notes
   Reconcile, —
Then travel forwards. So we slowly rise,
   And every mile
Of our long journey mark with eager eyes;
   So we progress
With gurge of revolution and recoil,
   Slaughter and stress
Of anguish because without fruit we toil,
   Without success;
Even as a ship upon the stormy flood
   With fluttering sails
Labours towards the shore; the angry mood
   Of Ocean swells,
Calms come and favouring winds, but yet afar
   The harbour pales
In evening mists and Ocean threatens war:
   Such is our life.
Of this be sure, the mighty game goes on,
   The glorious strife,
Until the goal predestined has been won.
   Not on the cliff
To be shattered has our ship set forth of old,
Nor in the surge
To founder. Therefore, King, be royal, bold,
And through the urge
Of winds, the reboant thunders and the close
Tempestuous surge
Press on for ever laughing at the blows
Of wind and wave.
The haven must be reached; we rise from pyre,
We rise from grave,
We mould our future by our past desire,
We break, we save,
We find the music that we could not find,
The thought think out
We could not then perfect, and from the mind
That brilliant rout
Of wonders marshal into living forms.
End then thy doubt;
Grieve not for wounds, nor fear the violent storms,
For grief and pain
Are errors of the clouded soul; behind
They do not stain
The living spirit who to these is blind.
Torture, disdain,
Defeat and sorrow give him strength and joy:
*Twas for delight
He sought existence, and if pains alloy,
*Tis here in night
Which we call day. The Yogin knows, O King,
Who in his might
Travels beyond the mind’s imagining,
The worlds of dream.
For even they are shadows, even they
Are not, — they seem.
Behind them is a mighty blissful day
From which they stream.
The heavens of a million creeds are these:
Peopled they teem
By creatures full of joy and radiant ease.
  There is the mint
From which we are the final issue, types
  Which here we print
In dual letters. There no torture grips,
  Joy cannot stint
Her streams, — beneath a more than mortal sun
  Through golden air
The spirits of the deathless regions run.
  But we must dare
To still the mind into a perfect sleep
  And leave this lair
Of gross material flesh which we would keep
  Always, before
The guardians of felicity will ope
  The golden door.
That is our home and that the secret hope
  Our hearts explore.
To bring those heavens down upon the earth
  We all descend,
And fragments of it in the human birth
  We can command.
Perfect millenniums are sometimes, until
  In the sweet end
All secret heaven upon earth we spill,
  Then rise above
Taking mankind with us to the abode
  Of rapturous Love,
The bright epiphany whom we name God,
  Towards whom we drove
In spite of weakness, evil, grief and pain.
  He stands behind
The worlds of Sleep; He is and shall remain
  When they grow blind
To individual joys; for even these
  Are shadows, King,
And gloriously into that lustre cease
From which they spring.
We are but sparks of that most perfect fire,
Waves of that sea:
From Him we come, to Him we go, desire
Eternally,
And so long as He wills, our separate birth
Is and shall be.
Shrink not from life, O Aryan, but with mirth
And joy receive
His good and evil, sin and virtue, till
He bids thee leave.
But while thou livest, perfectly fulfil
Thy part, conceive
Earth as thy stage, thyself the actor strong,
The drama His.
Work, but the fruits to God alone belong,
Who only is.
Work, love and know,—so shall thy spirit win
Immortal bliss.
Love men, love God. Fear not to love, O King,
Fear not to enjoy;
For Death’s a passage, grief a fancied thing
Fools to annoy.
From self escape and find in love alone
A higher joy.

MANU
O Rishi, I have wide dominion,
The earth obeys
And heaven opens far beyond the sun
Her golden gaze.
But Him I seek, the still and perfect One,—
The Sun, not rays.
RISHI
Seek Him upon the earth. For thee He set
In the huge press
Of many worlds to build a mighty state
For man’s success,
Who seeks his goal. Perfect thy human might,
Perfect the race.
For thou art He, O King. Only the night
Is on thy soul
By thy own will. Remove it and recover
The serene whole
Thou art indeed, then raise up man the lover
To God the goal.

In the Moonlight

If now must pause the bullocks’ jingling tune,
Here let it be beneath the dreaming trees
Supine and huge that hang upon the breeze,
Here in the wide eye of the silent moon.

How living a stillness reigns! The night’s hushed rules
All things obey but three, the slow wind’s sigh
Among the leaves, the cricket’s ceaseless cry,
The frog’s harsh discord in the ringing pools.

Yet they but seem the silence to increase
And dreadful wideness of the inhuman night.
The whole hushed world immeasurable might
Be watching round this single spot of peace.

So boundless is the darkness and so rife
With thoughts of infinite reach that it creates
A dangerous sense of space and abrogates
The wholesome littleness of human life.