

*Canto One*

*The Pursuit of the Unknowable*

ALL IS too little that the world can give:  
Its power and knowledge are the gifts of Time  
And cannot fill the spirit's sacred thirst.  
Although of One these forms of greatness are  
And by its breath of grace our lives abide,  
Although more near to us than nearness' self,  
It is some utter truth of what we are;  
Hidden by its own works, it seemed far-off,  
Impenetrable, occult, voiceless, obscure.  
The Presence was lost by which all things have charm,  
The Glory lacked of which they are dim signs.  
The world lived on made empty of its Cause,  
Like love when the beloved's face is gone.  
The labour to know seemed a vain strife of Mind;  
All knowledge ended in the Unknowable:  
The effort to rule seemed a vain pride of Will;  
A trivial achievement scorned by Time,  
All power retired into the Omnipotent.  
A cave of darkness guards the eternal Light.  
A silence settled on his striving heart;  
Absolved from the voices of the world's desire,  
He turned to the Ineffable's timeless call.  
A Being intimate and unnameable,  
A wide compelling ecstasy and peace  
Felt in himself and all and yet ungrasped,  
Approached and faded from his soul's pursuit  
As if for ever luring him beyond.  
Near, it retreated; far, it called him still.  
Nothing could satisfy but its delight:  
Its absence left the greatest actions dull,  
Its presence made the smallest seem divine.

When it was there, the heart's abyss was filled;  
But when the uplifting Deity withdrew,  
Existence lost its aim in the Inane.  
The order of the immemorial planes,  
The godlike fullness of the instruments  
Were turned to props for an impermanent scene.  
But who that mightiness was he knew not yet.  
Impalpable, yet filling all that is,  
It made and blotted out a million worlds  
And took and lost a thousand shapes and names.  
It wore the guise of an indiscernible Vast,  
Or was a subtle kernel in the soul:  
A distant greatness left it huge and dim,  
A mystic closeness shut it sweetly in:  
It seemed sometimes a figment or a robe  
And seemed sometimes his own colossal shade.  
A giant doubt overshadowed his advance.  
Across a neutral all-supporting Void  
Whose blankness nursed his lone immortal spirit,  
Allured towards some recondite Supreme,  
Aided, coerced by enigmatic Powers,  
Aspiring and half-sinking and upborne,  
Invincibly he ascended without pause.  
Always a signless vague Immensity  
Brooded, without approach, beyond response,  
Condemning finite things to nothingness,  
Fronting him with the incommensurable.  
Then to the ascent there came a mighty term.  
A height was reached where nothing made could live,  
A line where every hope and search must cease  
Neared some intolerant bare Reality,  
A zero formed pregnant with boundless change.  
On a dizzy verge where all disguises fail  
And human mind must abdicate in Light  
Or die like a moth in the naked blaze of Truth,  
He stood compelled to a tremendous choice.

All he had been and all towards which he grew  
Must now be left behind or else transform  
Into a self of That which has no name.  
Alone and fronting an intangible Force  
Which offered nothing to the grasp of Thought,  
His spirit faced the adventure of the Inane.  
Abandoned by the worlds of Form he strove.  
A fruitful world-wide Ignorance foundered here;  
Thought's long far-circling journey touched its close  
And ineffective paused the actor Will.  
The symbol modes of being helped no more,  
The structures Nescience builds collapsing failed,  
And even the spirit that holds the universe  
Fainted in luminous insufficiency.  
In an abysmal lapse of all things built  
Transcending every perishable support  
And joining at last its mighty origin,  
The separate self must melt or be reborn  
Into a Truth beyond the mind's appeal.  
All glory of outline, sweetness of harmony,  
Rejected like a grace of trivial notes,  
Expunged from Being's silence nude, austere,  
Died into a fine and blissful Nothingness.  
The Demiurges lost their names and forms,  
The great schemed worlds that they had planned and wrought  
Passed, taken and abolished one by one.  
The universe removed its coloured veil,  
And at the unimaginable end  
Of the huge riddle of created things  
Appeared the far-seen Godhead of the whole,  
His feet firm-based on Life's stupendous wings,  
Omnipotent, a lonely seer of Time,  
Inward, inscrutable, with diamond gaze.  
Attracted by the unfathomable regard  
The unsolved slow cycles to their fount returned  
To rise again from that invisible sea.

All from his puissance born was now undone;  
Nothing remained the cosmic Mind conceives.  
Eternity prepared to fade and seemed  
A hue and imposition on the Void,  
Space was the fluttering of a dream that sank  
Before its ending into Nothing's deeps.  
The spirit that dies not and the Godhead's self  
Seemed myths projected from the Unknowable;  
From It all sprang, in It is called to cease.  
But what That was, no thought nor sight could tell.  
Only a formless Form of self was left,  
A tenuous ghost of something that had been,  
The last experience of a lapsing wave  
Before it sinks into a bourneless sea, —  
As if it kept even on the brink of Nought  
Its bare feeling of the ocean whence it came.  
A Vastness brooded free from sense of Space,  
An Everlastingness cut off from Time;  
A strange sublime inalterable Peace  
Silent rejected from its world and soul.  
A stark companionless Reality  
Answered at last to his soul's passionate search:  
Passionless, wordless, absorbed in its fathomless hush,  
Keeping the mystery none would ever pierce,  
It brooded inscrutable and intangible  
Facing him with its dumb tremendous calm.  
It had no kinship with the universe:  
There was no act, no movement in its Vast:  
Life's question met by its silence died on her lips,  
The world's effort ceased convicted of ignorance  
Finding no sanction of supernal Light:  
There was no mind there with its need to know,  
There was no heart there with its need to love.  
All person perished in its namelessness.  
There was no second, it had no partner or peer;  
Only itself was real to itself.

A pure existence safe from thought and mood,  
A consciousness of unshared immortal bliss,  
It dwelt aloof in its bare infinite,  
One and unique, unutterably sole.  
A Being formless, featureless and mute  
That knew itself by its own timeless self,  
Aware for ever in its motionless depths,  
Uncreating, uncreated and unborn,  
The One by whom all live, who lives by none,  
An immeasurable luminous secrecy  
Guarded by the veils of the Unmanifest,  
Above the changing cosmic interlude  
Abode supreme, immutably the same,  
A silent Cause occult, impenetrable, —  
Infinite, eternal, unthinkable, alone.

END OF CANTO ONE