

Canto Three

The Glory and the Fall of Life

AN UNEVEN broad ascent now lured his feet.
Answering a greater Nature's troubled call
He crossed the limits of embodied Mind
And entered wide obscure disputed fields
Where all was doubt and change and nothing sure,
A world of search and toil without repose.
As one who meets the face of the Unknown,
A questioner with none to give reply,
Attracted to a problem never solved,
Always uncertain of the ground he trod,
Always drawn on to an inconstant goal
He travelled through a land peopled by doubts
In shifting confines on a quaking base.
In front he saw a boundary ever unreached
And thought himself at each step nearer now, —
A far retreating horizon of mirage.
A vagrancy was there that brooked no home,
A journey of countless paths without a close.
Nothing he found to satisfy his heart;
A tireless wandering sought and could not cease.
There life is the manifest Incalculable,
A movement of unquiet seas, a long
And venturesome leap of spirit into Space,
A vexed disturbance in the eternal Calm,
An impulse and passion of the Infinite.
Assuming whatever shape her fancy wills,
Escaped from the restraint of settled forms
She has left the safety of the tried and known.
Unshepherded by the fear that walks through Time,
Undaunted by Fate that dogs and Chance that springs,
She accepts disaster as a common risk;

Careless of suffering, heedless of sin and fall,
She wrestles with danger and discovery
In the unexplored expanses of the soul.
To be seemed only a long experiment,
The hazard of a seeking ignorant Force
That tries all truths and, finding none supreme,
Moves on unsatisfied, unsure of its end.
As saw some inner mind, so life was shaped:
From thought to thought she passed, from phase to phase,
Tortured by her own powers or proud and blest,
Now master of herself, now toy and slave.
A huge inconsequence was her action's law,
As if all possibility must be drained,
And anguish and bliss were pastimes of the heart.
In a gallop of thunder-hooved vicissitudes
She swept through the race-fields of Circumstance,
Or, swaying, she tossed between her heights and deeps,
Uplifted or broken on Time's inconstant wheel.
Amid a tedious crawl of drab desires
She writhed, a worm mid worms in Nature's mud,
Then, Titan-statured, took all earth for food,
Ambitioned the seas for robe, for crown the stars
And shouting strode from peak to giant peak,
Clamouring for worlds to conquer and to rule.
Then, wantonly enamoured of Sorrow's face,
She plunged into the anguish of the depths
And, wallowing, clung to her own misery.
In dolorous converse with her squandered self
She wrote the account of all that she had lost,
Or sat with grief as with an ancient friend.
A romp of violent raptures soon was spent,
Or she lingered tied to an inadequate joy
Missing the turns of fate, missing life's goal.
A scene was planned for all her numberless moods
Where each could be the law and way of life,
But none could offer a pure felicity;

Only a flickering zest they left behind
Or the fierce lust that brings a dead fatigue.
Amid her swift untold variety
Something remained dissatisfied, ever the same
And in the new saw only a face of the old,
For every hour repeated all the rest
And every change prolonged the same unease.
A spirit of her self and aim unsure,
Tired soon of too much joy and happiness,
She needs the spur of pleasure and of pain
And the native taste of suffering and unrest:
She strains for an end that never can she win.
A perverse savour haunts her thirsting lips:
For the grief she weeps which came from her own choice,
For the pleasure yearns that racked with wounds her breast;
Aspiring to heaven she turns her steps towards hell.
Chance she has chosen and danger for playfellows;
Fate's dreadful swing she has taken for cradle and seat.
Yet pure and bright from the Timeless was her birth,
A lost world-rapture lingers in her eyes,
Her moods are faces of the Infinite:
Beauty and happiness are her native right,
And endless Bliss is her eternal home.

This now revealed its antique face of joy,
A sudden disclosure to the heart of grief
Tempting it to endure and long and hope.
Even in changing worlds bereft of peace,
In an air racked with sorrow and with fear
And while his feet trod on a soil unsafe,
He saw the image of a happier state.
In an architecture of hieratic Space
Circling and mounting towards creation's tops,
At a blue height which never was too high
For warm communion between body and soul,
As far as heaven, as near as thought and hope,

Glimmered the kingdom of a griefless life.
Above him in a new celestial vault
Other than the heavens beheld by mortal eyes,
As on a fretted ceiling of the gods,
An archipelago of laughter and fire,
Swam stars apart in a rippled sea of sky.
Towered spirals, magic rings of vivid hue
And gleaming spheres of strange felicity
Floated through distance like a symbol world.
On the trouble and the toil they could not share,
On the unhappiness they could not aid,
Impervious to life's suffering, struggle, grief,
Untarnished by its anger, gloom and hate,
Unmoved, untouched, looked down great visioned planes
Blissful for ever in their timeless right.
Absorbed in their own beauty and content,
Of their immortal gladness they live sure.
Apart in their self-glory plunged, remote
Burning they swam in a vague lucent haze,
An everlasting refuge of dream-light,
A nebula of the splendours of the gods
Made from the musings of eternity.
Almost unbelievable by human faith,
Hardly they seemed the stuff of things that are.
As through a magic television's glass
Outlined to some magnifying inner eye
They shone like images thrown from a far scene
Too high and glad for mortal lids to seize.
But near and real to the longing heart
And to the body's passionate thought and sense
Are the hidden kingdoms of beatitude.
In some close unattained realm which yet we feel,
Immune from the harsh clutch of Death and Time,
Escaping the search of sorrow and desire,
In bright enchanted safe peripheries
For ever wallowing in bliss they lie.

In dream and trance and muse before our eyes,
Across a subtle vision's inner field,
Wide rapturous landscapes fleeting from the sight,
The figures of the perfect kingdom pass
And behind them leave a shining memory's trail.
Imagined scenes or great eternal worlds,
Dream-caught or sensed, they touch our hearts with their depths;
Unreal-seeming, yet more real than life,
Happier than happiness, truer than things true,
If dreams these were or captured images,
Dream's truth made false earth's vain realities.
In a swift eternal moment fixed there live
Or ever recalled come back to longing eyes
Calm heavens of imperishable Light,
Illumined continents of violet peace,
Oceans and rivers of the mirth of God
And griefless countries under purple suns.

This, once a star of bright remote idea
Or imagination's comet trail of dream,
Took now a close shape of reality.
The gulf between dream-truth, earth-fact was crossed,
The wonder-worlds of life were dreams no more;
His vision made all they unveiled its own:
Their scenes, their happenings met his eyes and heart
And smote them with pure loveliness and bliss.
A breathless summit region drew his gaze
Whose boundaries jutted into a sky of Self
And dipped towards a strange ethereal base.
The quintessence glowed of Life's supreme delight.
On a spiritual and mysterious peak
Only a miracle's high transfiguring line
Divided life from the formless Infinite
And sheltered Time against eternity.
Out of that formless stuff Time mints his shapes;
The Eternal's quiet holds the cosmic act:

The protean images of the World-Force
Have drawn the strength to be, the will to last
From a deep ocean of dynamic peace.
Inverting the spirit's apex towards life,
She spends the plastic liberties of the One
To cast in acts the dreams of her caprice,
His wisdom's call steadies her careless feet,
He props her dance upon a rigid base,
His timeless still immutability
Must standardise her creation's miracle.
Out of the Void's unseeing energies
Inventing the scene of a concrete universe,
By his thought she has fixed its paces, in its blind acts
She sees by flashes of his all-knowing Light.
At her will the inscrutable Supermind leans down
To guide her force that feels but cannot know,
Its breath of power controls her restless seas
And life obeys the governing Idea.
At her will, led by a luminous Immanence
The hazardous experimenting Mind
Pushes its way through obscure possibles
Mid chance formations of an unknowing world.
Our human ignorance moves towards the Truth
That Nescience may become omniscient,
Transmuted instincts shape to divine thoughts,
Thoughts house infallible immortal sight
And Nature climb towards God's identity.
The Master of the worlds self-made her slave
Is the executor of her fantasies:
She has canalised the seas of omnipotence;
She has limited by her laws the Illimitable.
The Immortal bound himself to do her works;
He labours at the tasks her Ignorance sets,
Hidden in the cape of our mortality.
The worlds, the forms her goddess fancy makes
Have lost their origin on unseen heights:

Even severed, straying from their timeless source,
Even deformed, obscure, accursed and fallen, —
Since even fall has its perverted joy
And nothing she leaves out that serves delight, —
These too can to the peaks revert or here
Cut out the sentence of the spirit's fall,
Recover their forfeited divinity.
At once caught in an eternal vision's sweep
He saw her pride and splendour of highborn zones
And her regions crouching in the nether deeps.
Above was a monarchy of unfallen self,
Beneath was the gloomy trance of the abyss,
An opposite pole or dim antipodes.
There were vasts of the glory of life's absolutes:
All laughed in a safe immortality
And an eternal childhood of the soul
Before darkness came and pain and grief were born
Where all could dare to be themselves and one
And Wisdom played in sinless innocence
With naked Freedom in Truth's happy sun.
There were worlds of her laughter and dreadful irony,
There were fields of her taste of toil and strife and tears;
Her head lay on the breast of amorous Death,
Sleep imitated awhile extinction's peace.
The light of God she has parted from his dark
To test the savour of bare opposites.
Here mingling in man's heart their tones and hues
Have woven his being's mutable design,
His life a forward-rippling stream in Time,
His nature's constant fixed mobility,
His soul a moving picture's changeful film,
His cosmos-chaos of personality.
The grand creatrix with her cryptic touch
Has turned to pathos and power being's self-dream,
Made a passion-play of its fathomless mystery.

But here were worlds lifted half-way to heaven.
The Veil was there but not the Shadowy Wall;
In forms not too remote from human grasp
Some passion of the inviolate purity
Broke through, a ray of the original Bliss.
Heaven's joys might have been earth's if earth were pure.
There could have reached our divinised sense and heart
Some natural felicity's bright extreme,
Some thrill of Supernature's absolutes:
All strengths could laugh and sport on earth's hard roads
And never feel her cruel edge of pain,
All love could play and nowhere Nature's shame.
But she has stabled her dreams in Matter's courts
And still her doors are barred to things supreme.
These worlds could feel God's breath visiting their tops;
Some glimmer of the Transcendent's hem was there.
Across the white aeonic silences
Immortal figures of embodied joy
Traversed wide spaces near to eternity's sleep.
Pure mystic voices in beatitude's hush
Appealed to Love's immaculate sweetnesses,
Calling his honeyed touch to thrill the worlds,
His blissful hands to seize on Nature's limbs,
His sweet intolerant might of union
To take all beings into his saviour arms,
Drawing to his pity the rebel and the waif
To force on them the happiness they refuse.
A chant hymeneal to the unseen Divine,
A flaming rhapsody of white desire
Lured an immortal music into the heart
And woke the slumbering ear of ecstasy.
A purer, fierier sense had there its home,
A burning urge no earthly limbs can hold;
One drew a large unburdened spacious breath
And the heart sped from beat to rapturous beat.
The voice of Time sang of the Immortal's joy;

An inspiration and a lyric cry,
The moments came with ecstasy on their wings;
Beauty unimaginable moved heaven-bare
Absolved from boundaries in the vasts of dream;
The cry of the Birds of Wonder called from the skies
To the deathless people of the shores of Light.
Creation leaped straight from the hands of God;
Marvel and rapture wandered in the ways.
Only to be was a supreme delight,
Life was a happy laughter of the soul
And Joy was king with Love for minister.
The spirit's luminousness was bodied there.
Life's contraries were lovers or natural friends
And her extremes keen edges of harmony:
Indulgence with a tender purity came
And nursed the god on her maternal breast:
There none was weak, so falsehood could not live;
Ignorance was a thin shade protecting light,
Imagination the free-will of Truth,
Pleasure a candidate for heaven's fire;
The intellect was Beauty's worshipper,
Strength was the slave of calm spiritual law,
Power laid its head upon the breasts of Bliss.
There were summit-glories inconceivable,
Autonomies of Wisdom's still self-rule
And high dependencies of her virgin sun,
Illumined theocracies of the seeing soul
Throned in the power of the Transcendent's ray.
A vision of grandeurs, a dream of magnitudes
In sun-bright kingdoms moved with regal gait:
Assemblies, crowded senates of the gods,
Life's puissances reigned on seats of marble will,
High dominations and autocracies
And laurelled strengths and armed imperative might.
All objects there were great and beautiful,
All beings wore a royal stamp of power.

There sat the oligarchies of natural Law,
Proud violent heads served one calm monarch brow:
All the soul's postures donned divinity.
There met the ardent mutual intimacies
Of mastery's joy and the joy of servitude
Imposed by Love on Love's heart that obeys
And Love's body held beneath a rapturous yoke.
All was a game of meeting kinglinesses.
For worship lifts the worshipper's bowed strength
Close to the god's pride and bliss his soul adores:
The ruler there is one with all he rules;
To him who serves with a free equal heart
Obedience is his princely training's school,
His nobility's coronet and privilege,
His faith is a high nature's idiom,
His service a spiritual sovereignty.
There were realms where Knowledge joined creative Power
In her high home and made her all his own:
The grand Illuminate seized her gleaming limbs
And filled them with the passion of his ray
Till all her body was its transparent house
And all her soul a counterpart of his soul.
Apotheosised, transfigured by wisdom's touch,
Her days became a luminous sacrifice;
An immortal moth in happy and endless fire,
She burned in his sweet intolerable blaze.
A captive Life wedded her conqueror.
In his wide sky she built her world anew;
She gave to mind's calm pace the motor's speed,
To thinking a need to live what the soul saw,
To living an impetus to know and see.
His splendour grasped her, her puissance to him clung;
She crowned the Idea a king in purple robes,
Put her magic serpent sceptre in Thought's grip,
Made forms his inward vision's rhythmic shapes
And her acts the living body of his will.

A flaming thunder, a creator flash,
His victor Light rode on her deathless Force;
A centaur's mighty gallop bore the god.
Life throned with mind, a double majesty.
Worlds were there of a happiness great and grave
And action tinged with dream, laughter with thought,
And passion there could wait for its desire
Until it heard the near approach of God.
Worlds were there of a childlike mirth and joy;
A carefree youthfulness of mind and heart
Found in the body a heavenly instrument;
It lit an aureate halo round desire
And freed the deified animal in the limbs
To divine gambols of love and beauty and bliss.
On a radiant soil that gazed at heaven's smile
A swift life-impulse stinted not nor stopped:
It knew not how to tire; happy were its tears.
There work was play and play the only work,
The tasks of heaven a game of godlike might:
A celestial bacchanal for ever pure,
Unstayed by faintness as in mortal frames
Life was an eternity of rapture's moods:
Age never came, care never lined the face.
Imposing on the safety of the stars
A race and laughter of immortal strengths,
The nude god-children in their play-fields ran
Smiting the winds with splendour and with speed;
Of storm and sun they made companions,
Sported with the white mane of tossing seas,
Slew distance trampled to death under their wheels
And wrestled in the arenas of their force.
Imperious in their radiance like the suns
They kindled heaven with the glory of their limbs
Flung like a divine largess to the world.
A spell to force the heart to stark delight,
They carried the pride and mastery of their charm

As if Life's banner on the roads of Space.
Ideas were luminous comrades of the soul;
Mind played with speech, cast javelins of thought,
But needed not these instruments' toil to know;
Knowledge was Nature's pastime like the rest.
Investitured with the fresh heart's bright ray,
An early God-instinct's child inheritors,
Tenants of the perpetuity of Time
Still thrilling with the first creation's bliss,
They steeped existence in their youth of soul.
An exquisite and vehement tyranny,
The strong compulsion of their will to joy
Poured smiling streams of happiness through the world.
There reigned a breath of high immune content,
A fortunate gait of days in tranquil air,
A flood of universal love and peace.
A sovereignty of tireless sweetness lived
Like a song of pleasure on the lips of Time.
A large spontaneous order freed the will,
A sun-frank winging of the soul to bliss,
The breadth and greatness of the unfettered act
And the swift fire-heart's golden liberty.
There was no falsehood of soul-severance,
There came no crookedness of thought or word
To rob creation of its native truth;
All was sincerity and natural force.
There freedom was sole rule and highest law.
In a happy series climbed or plunged these worlds:
In realms of curious beauty and surprise,
In fields of grandeur and of titan power,
Life played at ease with her immense desires.
A thousand Edens she could build nor pause;
No bound was set to her greatness and to her grace
And to her heavenly variety.
Awake with a cry and stir of numberless souls,
Arisen from the breast of some deep Infinite,

Smiling like a new-born child at love and hope,
In her nature housing the Immortal's power,
In her bosom bearing the eternal Will,
No guide she needed but her luminous heart:
No fall debased the godhead of her steps,
No alien Night had come to blind her eyes.
There was no use for grudging ring or fence;
Each act was a perfection and a joy.
Abandoned to her rapid fancy's moods
And the rich coloured riot of her mind,
Initiate of divine and mighty dreams,
Magician builder of unnumbered forms
Exploring the measures of the rhythms of God,
At will she wove her wizard wonder-dance,
A Dionysian goddess of delight,
A Bacchant of creative ecstasy.

This world of bliss he saw and felt its call,
But found no way to enter into its joy;
Across the conscious gulf there was no bridge.
A darker air encircled still his soul
Tied to an image of unquiet life.
In spite of yearning mind and longing sense,
To a sad Thought by grey experience formed
And a vision dimmed by care and sorrow and sleep
All this seemed only a bright desirable dream
Conceived in a longing distance by the heart
Of one who walks in the shadow of earth-pain.
Although he once had felt the Eternal's clasp,
Too near to suffering worlds his nature lived,
And where he stood were entrances of Night.
Hardly, too close beset by the world's care,
Can the dense mould in which we have been made
Return sheer joy to joy, pure light to light.
For its tormented will to think and live
First to a mingled pain and pleasure woke

And still it keeps the habit of its birth:
A dire duality is our way to be.
In the crude beginnings of this mortal world
Life was not nor mind's play nor heart's desire.
When earth was built in the unconscious Void
And nothing was save a material scene,
Identified with sea and sky and stone
Her young gods yearned for the release of souls
Asleep in objects, vague, inanimate.
In that desolate grandeur, in that beauty bare,
In the deaf stillness, mid the unheeded sounds,
Heavy was the uncommunicated load
Of Godhead in a world that had no needs;
For none was there to feel or to receive.
This solid mass which brooked no throb of sense
Could not contain their vast creative urge:
Immersed no more in Matter's harmony,
The Spirit lost its statuesque repose.
In the uncaring trance it groped for sight,
Passioned for the movements of a conscious heart,
Famishing for speech and thought and joy and love,
In the dumb insensitive wheeling day and night
Hungered for the beat of yearning and response.
The poised inconscience shaken with a touch,
The intuitive Silence trembling with a name,
They cried to Life to invade the senseless mould
And in brute forms awake divinity.
A voice was heard on the mute rolling globe,
A murmur moaned in the unlistening Void.
A being seemed to breathe where once was none:
Something pent up in dead insentient depths,
Denied conscious existence, lost to joy,
Turned as if one asleep since dateless time.
Aware of its own buried reality,
Remembering its forgotten self and right,
It yearned to know, to aspire, to enjoy, to live.

Life heard the call and left her native light.
Overflowing from her bright magnificent plane
On the rigid coil and sprawl of mortal Space,
Here too the gracious great-winged Angel poured
Her splendour and her swiftness and her bliss,
Hoping to fill a fair new world with joy.
As comes a goddess to a mortal's breast
And fills his days with her celestial clasp,
She stooped to make her home in transient shapes;
In Matter's womb she cast the Immortal's fire,
In the unfeeling Vast woke thought and hope,
Smote with her charm and beauty flesh and nerve
And forced delight on earth's insensible frame.
Alive and clad with trees and herbs and flowers
Earth's great brown body smiled towards the skies,
Azure replied to azure in the sea's laugh;
New sentient creatures filled the unseen depths,
Life's glory and swiftness ran in the beauty of beasts,
Man dared and thought and met with his soul the world.
But while the magic breath was on its way,
Before her gifts could reach our prisoned hearts,
A dark ambiguous Presence questioned all.
The secret Will that robes itself with Night
And offers to spirit the ordeal of the flesh,
Imposed a mystic mask of death and pain.
Interned now in the slow and suffering years
Sojourns the winged and wonderful wayfarer
And can no more recall her happier state,
But must obey the inert Inconscient's law,
Insensible foundation of a world
In which blind limits are on beauty laid
And sorrow and joy as struggling comrades live.
A dim and dreadful muteness fell on her:
Abolished was her subtle mighty spirit
And slain her boon of child-god happiness,
And all her glory into littleness turned

And all her sweetness into a maimed desire.
To feed death with her works is here life's doom.
So veiled was her immortality that she seemed,
Inflicting consciousness on unconscious things,
An episode in an eternal death,
A myth of being that must for ever cease.
Such was the evil mystery of her change.

END OF CANTO THREE