

Canto One

The World-Stair

ALONE he moved watched by the infinity
Around him and the Unknowable above.
All could be seen that shuns the mortal eye,
All could be known the mind has never grasped;
All could be done no mortal will can dare.
A limitless movement filled a limitless peace.
In a profound existence beyond earth's
Parent or kin to our ideas and dreams
Where Space is a vast experiment of the soul,
In an immaterial substance linked to ours
In a deep oneness of all things that are,
The universe of the Unknown arose.
A self-creation without end or pause
Revealed the grandeurs of the Infinite:
It flung into the hazards of its play
A million moods, a myriad energies,
The world-shapes that are fancies of its Truth
And the formulas of the freedom of its Force.
It poured into the Ever-stable's flux
A bacchic rapture and revel of Ideas,
A passion and motion of everlastingness.
There rose unborn into the Unchanging's surge
Thoughts that abide in their deathless consequence,
Words that immortal last though fallen mute,
Acts that brought out from Silence its dumb sense,
Lines that convey the inexpressible.
The Eternal's stillness saw in unmoved joy
His universal Power at work display
In plots of pain and dramas of delight
The wonder and beauty of her will to be.
All, even pain, was the soul's pleasure here;

Here all experience was a single plan,
The thousandfold expression of the One.
All came at once into his single view;
Nothing escaped his vast intuitive sight,
Nothing drew near he could not feel as kin:
He was one spirit with that immensity.
Images in a supernal consciousness
Embodying the Unborn who never dies,
The structured visions of the cosmic Self
Alive with the touch of being's eternity
Looked at him like form-bound spiritual thoughts
Figuring the movements of the Ineffable.
Aspects of being donned world-outline; forms
That open moving doors on things divine,
Became familiar to his hourly sight;
The symbols of the Spirit's reality,
The living bodies of the Bodiless
Grew near to him, his daily associates.
The exhaustless seeings of the unsleeping Mind,
Letterings of its contact with the invisible,
Surrounded him with countless pointing signs;
The voices of a thousand realms of Life
Missioned to him her mighty messages.
The heaven-hints that invade our earthly lives,
The dire imaginations dreamed by Hell,
Which if enacted and experienced here
Our dulled capacity soon would cease to feel
Or our mortal frailty could not long endure,
Were set in their sublime proportions there.
There lived out in their self-born atmosphere,
They resumed their topless pitch and native power;
Their fortifying stress upon the soul
Bit deep into the ground of consciousness
The passion and purity of their extremes,
The absoluteness of their single cry
And the sovereign sweetness or violent poetry

Of their beautiful or terrible delight.
All thought can know or widest sight perceive
And all that thought and sight can never know,
All things occult and rare, remote and strange
Were near to heart's contact, felt by spirit-sense.
Asking for entry at his nature's gates
They crowded the widened spaces of his mind,
His self-discovery's flaming witnesses,
Offering their marvel and their multitude.
These now became new portions of himself,
The figures of his spirit's greater life,
The moving scenery of his large time-walk
Or the embroidered tissue of his sense:
These took the place of intimate human things
And moved as close companions of his thoughts,
Or were his soul's natural environment.
Tireless the heart's adventure of delight,
Endless the kingdoms of the Spirit's bliss,
Unnumbered tones struck from one harmony's strings;
Each to its wide-winged universal poise,
Its fathomless feeling of the All in one,
Brought notes of some perfection yet unseen,
Its single retreat into Truth's secrecies,
Its happy sidelight on the Infinite.
All was found there the Unique has dreamed and made
Tinging with ceaseless rapture and surprise
And an opulent beauty of passionate difference
The recurring beat that moments God in Time.
Only was missing the sole timeless Word
That carries eternity in its lonely sound,
The Idea self-luminous key to all ideas,
The integer of the Spirit's perfect sum
That equates the unequal All to the equal One,
The single sign interpreting every sign,
The absolute index to the Absolute.

There walled apart by its own innerness
In a mystical barrage of dynamic light
He saw a lone immense high-curved world-pile
Erect like a mountain-chariot of the Gods
Motionless under an inscrutable sky.
As if from Matter's plinth and viewless base
To a top as viewless, a carved sea of worlds
Climbing with foam-maned waves to the Supreme
Ascended towards breadths immeasurable;
It hoped to soar into the Ineffable's reign:
A hundred levels raised it to the Unknown.
So it towered up to heights intangible
And disappeared in the hushed conscious Vast
As climbs a storeyed temple-tower to heaven
Built by the aspiring soul of man to live
Near to his dream of the Invisible.
Infinity calls to it as it dreams and climbs;
Its spire touches the apex of the world;
Mounting into great voiceless stillnesses
It marries the earth to screened eternities.
Amid the many systems of the One
Made by an interpreting creative joy
Alone it points us to our journey back
Out of our long self-loss in Nature's deeps;
Planted on earth it holds in it all realms:
It is a brief compendium of the Vast.
This was the single stair to being's goal.
A summary of the stages of the spirit,
Its copy of the cosmic hierarchies
Refashioned in our secret air of self
A subtle pattern of the universe.
It is within, below, without, above.
Acting upon this visible Nature's scheme
It wakens our earth-matter's heavy doze
To think and feel and to react to joy;
It models in us our diviner parts,

Lifts mortal mind into a greater air,
Makes yearn this life of flesh to intangible aims,
Links the body's death with immortality's call:
Out of the swoon of the Inconscience
It labours towards a superconscient Light.
If earth were all and this were not in her,
Thought could not be nor life-delight's response:
Only material forms could then be her guests
Driven by an inanimate world-force.
Earth by this golden superfluity
Bore thinking man and more than man shall bear;
This higher scheme of being is our cause
And holds the key to our ascending fate;
It calls out of our dense mortality
The conscious spirit nursed in Matter's house.
The living symbol of these conscious planes,
Its influences and godheads of the unseen,
Its unthought logic of Reality's acts
Arisen from the unspoken truth in things,
Have fixed our inner life's slow-scaled degrees.
Its steps are paces of the soul's return
From the deep adventure of material birth,
A ladder of delivering ascent
And rungs that Nature climbs to deity.
Once in the vigil of a deathless gaze
These grades had marked her giant downward plunge,
The wide and prone leap of a godhead's fall.
Our life is a holocaust of the Supreme.
The great World-Mother by her sacrifice
Has made her soul the body of our state;
Accepting sorrow and unconsciousness
Divinity's lapse from its own splendours wove
The many-patterned ground of all we are.
An idol of self is our mortality.
Our earth is a fragment and a residue;
Her power is packed with the stuff of greater worlds

And steeped in their colour-lustres dimmed by her drowse;
An atavism of higher births is hers,
Her sleep is stirred by their buried memories
Recalling the lost spheres from which they fell.
Unsatisfied forces in her bosom move;
They are partners of her greater growing fate
And her return to immortality;
They consent to share her doom of birth and death;
They kindle partial gleams of the All and drive
Her blind laborious spirit to compose
A meagre image of the mighty Whole.
The calm and luminous Intimacy within
Approves her work and guides the unseeing Power.
His vast design accepts a puny start.
An attempt, a drawing half-done is the world's life;
Its lines doubt their concealed significance,
Its curves join not their high intended close.
Yet some first image of greatness trembles there,
And when the ambiguous crowded parts have met
The many-toned unity to which they moved,
The Artist's joy shall laugh at reason's rules;
The divine intention suddenly shall be seen,
The end vindicate intuition's sure technique.
A graph shall be of many meeting worlds,
A cube and union-crystal of the gods;
A Mind shall think behind Nature's mindless mask,
A conscious Vast fill the old dumb brute Space.
This faint and fluid sketch of soul called man
Shall stand out on the background of long Time
A glowing epitome of eternity,
A little point reveal the infinitudes.
A Mystery's process is the universe.
At first was laid a strange anomalous base,
A void, a cipher of some secret Whole,
Where zero held infinity in its sum
And All and Nothing were a single term,

An eternal negative, a matrix Nought:
Into its forms the Child is ever born
Who lives for ever in the vasts of God.
A slow reversal's movement then took place:
A gas belched out from some invisible Fire,
Of its dense rings were formed these million stars;
Upon earth's new-born soil God's tread was heard.
Across the thick smoke of earth's ignorance
A Mind began to see and look at forms
And groped for knowledge in the nescient Night:
Caught in a blind stone-grip Force worked its plan
And made in sleep this huge mechanical world,
That Matter might grow conscious of its soul
And like a busy midwife the life-power
Deliver the zero carrier of the All.
Because eternal eyes turned on earth's gulfs
The lucent clarity of a pure regard
And saw a shadow of the Unknowable
Mirrored in the Inconscient's boundless sleep,
Creation's search for self began its stir.
A spirit dreamed in the crude cosmic whirl,
Mind flowed unknowing in the sap of life
And Matter's breasts suckled the divine Idea.
A miracle of the Absolute was born;
Infinity put on a finite soul,
All ocean lived within a wandering drop,
A time-made body housed the Illimitable.
To live this Mystery out our souls came here.

A Seer within who knows the ordered plan
Concealed behind our momentary steps,
Inspires our ascent to viewless heights
As once the abysmal leap to earth and life.
His call had reached the Traveller in Time.
Apart in an unfathomed loneliness,
He travelled in his mute and single strength

Bearing the burden of the world's desire.
A formless Stillness called, a nameless Light.
Above him was the white immobile Ray,
Around him the eternal Silences.
No term was fixed to the high-pitched attempt;
World after world disclosed its guarded powers,
Heaven after heaven its deep beatitudes,
But still the invisible Magnet drew his soul.
A figure sole on Nature's giant stair,
He mounted towards an indiscernible end
On the bare summit of created things.

END OF CANTO ONE