















# THE TOWER



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TORONTO

# THE TOWER

BY

W. B. YEATS

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*Can you  
 find the  
 the gift of Harun al-Rashid  
 in the text of the play?*



## SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

### I

THAT is no country for old men. The  
young

In one another's arms, birds in the  
trees,

—Those dying generations—at their  
song,

The salmon - falls, the mackerel -  
crowded seas,

Fish flesh or fowl, commend all  
summer long

Whatever is begotten born and dies.

(Caught in that sensual music all neglect  
Monuments of unaging intellect.

### II

An aged man is but a paltry thing,

A tattered coat upon a stick, unless

1

B

## 2 SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder  
sing

1  
For every tatter in its mortal dress,  
Nor is there singing school but study-  
ing

Monuments of its own magnificence ;  
And therefore I have sailed the seas  
and come

To the holy city of Byzantium.

### III

O sages standing in God's holy fire  
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,  
Come from the holy fire, perne in a  
gyre,

And be the singing masters of my soul.  
Consume my heart away ; sick with  
desire

And fastened to a dying animal  
It knows not what it is ; and gather  
me

Into the artifice of eternity.

IV

Once out of nature I shall never take  
My bodily form from any natural  
thing,  
But such a form as Grecian gold-  
smiths make  
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling  
To keep a drowsy emperor awake ;  
Or set upon a golden bough to sing  
To lords and ladies of Byzantium  
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.

## THE TOWER

### I

WHAT shall I do with this absurdity—  
O heart, O troubled heart—this cari-  
cature,  
Decrepit age that has been tied to me  
As to a dog's tail ?

Never had I more  
Excited, passionate, fantastical  
Imagination, nor an ear and eye  
That more expected the impossible—  
No, not in boyhood when with rod  
and fly,  
Or the humbler worm, I climbed Ben  
Bulben's back  
And had the livelong summer day to  
spend.

## THE TOWER

5

It seems that I must bid the Muse go  
    pack,  
Choose Plato and Plotinus for a friend  
Until imagination, ear and eye,  
Can be content with argument and  
    deal  
In abstract things ; or be derided by  
A sort of battered kettle at the heel.

## II

I pace upon the battlements and stare  
On the foundations of a house, or  
    where  
Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from  
    the earth ;  
And send imagination forth  
Under the day's declining beam, and  
    call  
Images and memories  
From ruin or from ancient trees,  
For I would ask a question of them all.

Beyond that ridge lived Mrs. French,  
and once  
When every silver candlestick or  
sconce  
Lit up the dark mahogany and the wine,  
A serving man that could divine  
That most respected lady's every wish,  
Ran and with the garden shears  
Clipped an insolent farmer's ears  
And brought them in a little covered  
dish.

Some few remembered still when I was  
young  
A peasant girl commended by a song,  
Who'd lived somewhere upon that  
rocky place,  
And praised the colour of her face,  
And had the greater joy in praising  
her,  
Remembering that, if walked she there,  
Farmers jostled at the fair  
So great a glory did the song confer.

## THE TOWER

7

And certain men, being maddened by  
those rhymes,  
Or else by toasting her a score of times,  
Rose from the table and declared it right  
To test their fancy by their sight ;  
But they mistook the brightness of  
the moon  
For the prosaic light of day—  
Music had driven their wits astray—  
And one was drowned in the great bog  
of Cloone.

Strange, but the man who made the  
song was blind,  
Yet, now I have considered it, I find  
That nothing strange ; the tragedy  
began  
With Homer that was a blind man,  
And Helen has all living hearts  
betrayed.  
O may the moon and sunlight seem  
One inextricable beam,  
For if I triumph I must make men mad.

And I myself created Hanrahan  
And drove him drunk or sober through  
the dawn

From somewhere in the neighbouring  
cottages.

Caught by an old man's juggleries  
He stumbled, tumbled, fumbled to and  
fro

And had but broken knees for hire  
And horrible splendour of desire ;  
I thought it all out twenty years ago :

Good fellows shuffled cards in an old  
bawn ;

And when that ancient ruffian's turn  
was on

He so bewitched the cards under his  
thumb

That all, but the one card, became  
A pack of hounds and not a pack of  
cards,

And that he changed into a hare.  
Hanrahan rose in frenzy there



And followed up those baying creatures  
towards—

O towards I have forgotten what—  
enough !

I must recall a man that neither love  
Nor music nor an enemy's clipped ear  
Could, he was so harried, cheer ;  
A figure that has grown so fabulous  
There's not a neighbour left to say  
When he finished his dog's day :  
An ancient bankrupt master of this  
house.

Before that ruin came, for centuries,  
Rough men-at-arms, cross-gartered to  
the knees  
Or shod in iron, climbed the narrow  
stairs,  
And certain men-at-arms there were  
Whose images, in the Great Memory  
stored,  
Come with loud cry and panting breast

To break upon a sleeper's rest  
While their great wooden dice beat on  
the board.

As I would question all, come all who  
can ;  
Come old, necessitous, half-mounted  
man ;  
And bring beauty's blind rambling  
celebrant ;  
The red man the juggler sent  
Through God-forsaken meadows ; Mrs.  
French,  
Gifted with so fine an ear ;  
The man drowned in a bog's mire,  
When mocking muses chose the  
country wench.

Did all old men and women, rich and  
poor,  
Who trod upon these rocks or passed  
this door,  
Whether in public or in secret rage

As I do now against old age ?  
But I have found an answer in those  
    eyes  
That are impatient to be gone ;  
Go therefore ; but leave Hanrahan  
For I need all his mighty memories.

Old lecher with a love on every wind  
Bring up out of that deep considering  
    mind  
All that you have discovered in the  
    grave,  
For it is certain that you have  
Reckoned up every unforeknown, un-  
    seeing  
Plunge, lured by a softening eye,  
Or by a touch or a sigh,  
Into the labyrinth of another's being ;

Does the imagination dwell the most  
Upon a woman won or woman lost ?  
If on the lost, admit you turned aside  
From a great labyrinth out of pride,

Cowardice, some silly over-subtle  
thought  
Or anything called conscience once ;  
And that if memory recur, the sun's  
Under eclipse and the day blotted out.

## III

It is time that I wrote my will ;  
I choose upstanding men,  
That climb the streams until  
The fountain leap, and at dawn  
Drop their cast at the side  
Of dripping stone ; I declare  
They shall inherit my pride,  
The pride of people that were  
Bound neither to Cause nor to State,  
Neither to slaves that were spat on,  
Nor to the tyrants that spat,  
The people of Burke and of Grattan  
That gave, though free to refuse—  
Pride, like that of the morn,  
When the headlong light is loose,  
Or that of the fabulous horn,

Or that of the sudden shower  
When all streams are dry,  
Or that of the hour  
When the swan must fix his eye  
Upon a fading gleam,  
Float out upon a long  
Last reach of glittering stream  
And there sing his last song.  
—And I declare my faith ;  
I mock Plotinus' thought  
And cry in Plato's teeth,  
Death and life were not  
Till man made up the whole,  
Made lock, stock and barrel  
Out of his bitter soul,  
Aye, sun and moon and star, all,  
And further add to that  
That, being dead, we rise,  
Dream and so create  
Translunar Paradise.  
I have prepared my peace  
With learned Italian things  
And the proud stones of Greece,

Poet's imaginings  
And memories of love,  
Memories of the words of women,  
All those things whereof  
Man makes a superhuman,  
Mirror-resembling dream.

As at the loophole there,  
The daws chatter and scream,  
And drop twigs layer upon layer.  
When they have mounted up,  
The mother bird will rest  
On their hollow top,  
And so warm her wild nest.

I leave both faith and pride  
To young upstanding men  
Climbing the mountain side,  
That under bursting dawn  
They may drop a fly ;  
Being of that metal made  
Till it was broken by  
This sedentary trade.

Now shall I make my soul  
Compelling it to study  
In a learned school  
Till the wreck of body  
Slow decay of blood,  
Testy delirium  
Or dull decrepitude,  
Or what worse evil come—  
The death of friends, or death  
Of every brilliant eye  
That made a catch in the breath—  
Seem but the clouds of the sky  
When the horizon fades ;  
Or a bird's sleepy cry  
Among the deepening shades.

## MEDITATIONS IN TIME OF CIVIL WAR

### I

#### ANCESTRAL HOUSES

SURELY among a rich man's flowering  
lawns,  
Amid the rustle of his planted hills,  
Life overflows without ambitious  
pains ;  
And rains down life until the basin  
spills,  
And mounts more dizzy high the more  
it rains  
As though to choose whatever shape  
it wills  
And never stoop to a mechanical,  
Or servile shape, at others' beck and  
call.



Mere dreams, mere dreams! Yet  
Homer had not sung  
Had he not found it certain beyond  
dreams  
That out of life's own self-delight had  
sprung  
The abounding glittering jet; though  
now it seems  
As if some marvellous empty sea-shell  
flung  
Out of the obscure dark of the rich  
streams,  
And not a fountain, were the symbol  
which  
Shadows the inherited glory of the rich.

Some violent bitter man, some power-  
ful man  
Called architect and artist in, that they,  
Bitter and violent men, might rear in  
stone  
The sweetness that all longed for night  
and day,

The gentleness none there had ever  
known ;  
But when the master's buried mice  
can play,  
And maybe the great-grandson of that  
house,  
For all its bronze and marble, 's but a  
mouse.

Oh what if gardens where the peacock  
strays  
With delicate feet upon old terraces,  
Or else all Juno from an urn dis-  
plays  
Before the indifferent garden deities ;  
Oh what if levelled lawns and gravelled  
ways  
Where slippered Contemplation finds  
his ease  
And Childhood a delight for every  
sense,  
But take our greatness with our  
violence !

MEDITATIONS 19

What if the glory of escutcheoned  
doors,  
And buildings that a haughtier age  
designed,  
The pacing to and fro on polished  
floors  
Amid great chambers and long  
galleries, lined  
With famous portraits of our ancestors ;  
What if those things the greatest of  
mankind,  
Consider most to magnify, or to bless,  
But take our greatness with our  
bitterness !

II

MY HOUSE

An ancient bridge, and a more ancient  
tower,  
A farmhouse that is sheltered by its  
wall,

An acre of stony ground,  
Where the symbolic rose can break in  
flower,  
Old ragged elms, old thorns innumer-  
able,  
The sound of the rain or sound  
Of every wind that blows ;  
The stilted water-hen  
Crossing stream again  
Scared by the splashing of a dozen  
cows ;

A winding stair, a chamber arched  
with stone,  
A grey stone fireplace with an open  
hearth,  
A candle and written page.  
*Il Penseroso's* Platonist toiled on  
In some like chamber, shadowing forth  
How the daemonic rage  
Imagined everything.  
Benighted travellers  
From markets and from fairs

Have seen his midnight candle glim-  
mering.

Two men have founded here. A man-  
at-arms  
Gathered a score of horse and spent  
his days  
In this tumultuous spot,  
Where through long wars and sudden  
night alarms  
His dwindling score and he seemed  
cast-a-ways  
Forgetting and forgot ;  
And I, that after me  
My bodily heirs may find,  
To exalt a lonely mind,  
Befitting emblems of adversity.

## III

## MY TABLE

Two heavy tressels, and a board  
Where Sato's gift, a changeless sword,

By pen and paper lies,  
That it may moralise  
My days out of their aimlessness.  
A bit of an embroidered dress  
Covers its wooden sheath.  
Chaucer had not drawn breath  
When it was forged. In Sato's house,  
Curved like new moon, moon luminous  
It lay five hundred years.  
Yet if no change appears  
No moon ; only an aching heart  
Conceives a changeless work of art.  
Our learned men have urged  
That when and where 'twas forged  
A marvellous accomplishment,  
In painting or in pottery, went  
From father unto son  
And through the centuries ran  
And seemed unchanging like the  
sword.  
Soul's beauty being most adored,  
Men and their business took  
The soul's unchanging look ;

For the most rich inheritor,  
Knowing that none could pass heaven's  
door  
That loved inferior art,  
Had such an aching heart  
That he, although a country's talk  
For silken clothes and stately walk,  
Had waking wits ; it seemed  
Juno's peacock screamed.

## IV

## MY DESCENDANTS

Having inherited a vigorous mind  
From my old fathers I must nourish  
dreams  
And leave a woman and a man behind  
As vigorous of mind, and yet it seems  
Life scarce can cast a fragrance on the  
wind,  
Scarce spread a glory to the morning  
beams,

But the torn petals strew the garden  
plot ;  
And there's but common greenness  
after that.

And what if my descendants lose the  
flower  
Through natural declension of the soul,  
Through too much business with the  
passing hour,  
Through too much play, or marriage  
with a fool ?  
May this laborious stair and this stark  
tower  
Become a roofless ruin that the owl  
May build in the cracked masonry  
and cry  
Her desolation to the desolate sky.

The Primum Mobile that fashioned us  
Has made the very owls in circles move ;  
And I, that count myself most  
prosperous,



Seeing that love and friendship are  
enough,  
For an old neighbour's friendship  
chose the house  
And decked and altered it for a girl's  
love,  
And know whatever flourish and decline  
These stones remain their monument  
and mine.

## V

## THE ROAD AT MY DOOR

An affable Irregular,  
A heavily built Falstaffan man,  
Comes cracking jokes of civil war  
As though to die by gunshot were  
The finest play under the sun.

A brown Lieutenant and his men,  
Half dressed in national uniform,  
Stand at my door, and I complain  
Of the foul weather, hail and rain,  
A pear tree broken by the storm.

I count those feathered balls of soot  
The moor-hen guides upon the stream,  
To silence the envy in my thought ;  
And turn towards my chamber, caught  
In the cold snows of a dream.

## VI

## THE STARE'S NEST BY MY WINDOW

The bees build in the crevices  
Of loosening masonry, and there  
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.  
My wall is loosening ; honey-bees  
Come build in the empty house of the  
stare.

We are closed in, and the key is turned  
On our uncertainty ; somewhere  
A man is killed, or a house burned,  
Yet no clear fact to be discerned :  
Come build in the empty house of the  
stare.

A barricade of stone or of wood ;  
Some fourteen days of civil war ;  
Last night they trundled down the road  
That dead young soldier in his blood :  
Come build in the empty house of the  
stare.

We had fed the heart on fantasies,  
The heart's grown brutal from the fare,  
More substance in our enmities  
Than in our love ; oh, honey-bees  
Come build in the empty house of the  
stare.

## VII

I SEE PHANTOMS OF HATRED AND OF  
THE HEART'S FULLNESS AND OF  
THE COMING EMPTINESS

I climb to the tower top and lean upon  
broken stone,  
A mist that is like blown snow is  
sweeping over all,

Valley, river, and elms, under the light  
of a moon

That seems unlike itself, that seems  
unchangeable,

A glittering sword out of the east. A  
puff of wind

And those white glimmering frag-  
ments of the mist sweep by.

Frenzies bewilder, reveries perturb  
the mind ;

Monstrous familiar images swim to  
the mind's eye.

' Vengeance upon the murderers,' the  
cry goes up,

' Vengeance for Jacques Molay.' In  
cloud-pale rags, or in lace,

The rage driven, rage tormented, and  
rage hungry troop,

Trooper belabouring trooper, biting at  
arm or at face,

Plunges towards nothing, arms and  
fingers spreading wide

For the embrace of nothing ; and I,  
 my wits astray  
 Because of all that senseless tumult,  
 all but cried  
 For vengeance on the murderers of  
 Jacques Molay.

Their legs long delicate and slender,  
 aquamarine their eyes,  
 Magical unicorns bear ladies on their  
 backs,  
 The ladies close their musing eyes.  
 No prophecies,  
 Remembered out of Babylonian  
 almanacs,  
 Have closed the ladies' eyes, their  
 minds are but a pool  
 Where even longing drowns under its  
 own excess ;  
 Nothing but stillness can remain when  
 hearts are full  
 Of their own sweetness, bodies of their  
 loveliness.

The cloud-pale unicorns, the eyes of  
aquamarine,  
The quivering half-closed eyelids, the  
rags of cloud or of lace,  
Or eyes that rage has brightened, arms  
it has made lean,  
Give place to an indifferent multitude,  
give place  
To brazen hawks. Nor self-delighting  
reverie,  
Nor hate of what's to come, nor pity  
for what's gone,  
Nothing but grip of claw, and the eye's  
complacency,  
The innumerable clanging wings that  
have put out the moon.

I turn away and shut the door, and on  
the stair  
Wonder how many times I could have  
proved my worth  
In something that all others under-  
stand or share ;

But oh, ambitious heart had such a  
proof drawn forth  
A company of friends, a conscience set  
at ease,  
It had but made us pine the more.  
The abstract joy,  
The half read wisdom of daemonic  
images,  
Suffice the ageing man as once the  
growing boy.

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND  
NINETEEN

I

MANY ingenious lovely things are gone  
That seemed sheer miracle to the  
multitude,

Protected from the circle of the moon  
That pitches common things about.

There stood

Amid the ornamental bronze and stone  
An ancient image made of olive wood—  
And gone are Phidias' famous ivories  
And all the golden grasshoppers and  
bees.

We too had many pretty toys when  
young ;

A law indifferent to blame or praise,



To bribe or threat ; habits that made  
old wrong  
Melt down, as it were wax in the sun's  
rays ;  
Public opinion ripening for so long  
We thought it would outlive all future  
days.  
O what fine thought we had because  
we thought  
That the worst rogues and rascals had  
died out.

All teeth were drawn, all ancient  
tricks unlearned,  
And a great army but a showy thing ;  
What matter that no cannon had been  
turned  
Into a ploughshare ; parliament and  
king  
Thought that unless a little powder  
burned  
The trumpeters might burst with  
trumpeting

34    NINETEEN - NINETEEN

And yet it lack all glory ; and per-  
chance  
The guardsmen's drowsy chargers would  
not prance.

Now days are dragon - ridden, the  
nightmare  
Rides upon sleep : a drunken soldiery  
Can leave the mother, murdered at  
her door,  
To crawl in her own blood, and go  
scot-free ;  
The night can sweat with terror as  
before  
We pieced our thoughts into philo-  
sophy,  
And planned to bring the world under  
a rule,  
Who are but weasels fighting in a  
hole.

He who can read the signs nor sink  
unmanned

Into the half-deceit of some intoxicant  
From shallow wits ; who knows no  
work can stand,  
Whether health, wealth or peace of  
mind were spent  
On master work of intellect or hand,  
No honour leave its mighty monument,  
Has but one comfort left : all triumph  
would  
But break upon his ghostly solitude.

But is there any comfort to be found ?  
Man is in love and loves what vanishes,  
What more is there to say ? That  
country round  
None dared admit, if such a thought  
were his,  
Incendiary or bigot could be found  
To burn that stump on the Acropolis,  
Or break in bits the famous ivories  
Or traffic in the grasshoppers or  
bees ?

II

When Loie Fuller's Chinese dancers  
enwound  
A shining web, a floating ribbon of  
cloth,  
It seemed that a dragon of air  
Had fallen among dancers, had whirled  
them round  
Or hurried them off on its own furious  
path ;  
So the platonic year  
Whirls out new right and wrong,  
Whirls in the old instead ;  
All men are dancers and their tread  
Goes to the barbarous clangour of  
gong.

III

Some moralist or mythological poet  
Compares the solitary soul to a swan ;  
I am satisfied with that,

Satisfied if a troubled mirror show  
it  
Before that brief gleam of its life be  
gone,  
An image of its state ;  
The wings half spread for flight,  
The breast thrust out in pride  
Whether to play, or to ride  
Those winds that clamour of approach-  
ing night.

A man in his own secret meditation  
Is lost amid the labyrinth that he has  
made  
In art or politics ;  
Some platonist affirms that in the  
station  
Where we should cast off body and trade  
The ancient habit sticks,  
And that if our works could  
But vanish with our breath  
That were a lucky death,  
For triumph can but mar our solitude.

38 NINETEEN - NINETEEN

The swan has leaped into the desolate  
heaven :

That image can bring wildness, bring  
a rage

To end all things, to end

What my laborious life imagined,  
even

The half imagined, the half written  
page ;

O but we dreamed to mend

Whatever mischief seemed

To afflict mankind, but now

That winds of winter blow

Learn that we were crack-pated when  
we dreamed.

IV

We, who seven years ago

Talked of honour and of truth,

Shriek with pleasure if we show

The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth.

v

Come let us mock at the great  
 That had such burdens on the mind  
 And toiled so hard and late  
 To leave some monument behind,  
 Nor thought of the levelling wind.

Come let us mock at the wise ;  
 With all those calendars whereon  
 They fixed old aching eyes,  
 They never saw how seasons run,  
 And now but gape at the sun.

Come let us mock at the good  
 That fancied goodness might be gay,  
 And sick of solitude  
 Might proclaim a holiday :  
 Wind shrieked—and where are they ?

Mock mockers after that  
 That would not lift a hand maybe  
 To help good, wise or great

40    NINETEEN-NINETEEN

To bar that foul storm out, for we  
Traffic in mockery.

VI

Violence upon the roads : violence of  
horses ;  
Some few have handsome riders, are  
garlanded  
On delicate sensitive ear or tossing  
mane,  
But wearied running round and round  
in their courses  
All break and vanish, and evil gathers  
head :  
Herodias' daughters have returned  
again  
A sudden blast of dusty wind and  
after  
Thunder of feet, tumult of images,  
Their purpose in the labyrinth of the  
wind ;



NINETEEN-NINETEEN 41

And should some crazy hand dare  
touch a daughter  
All turn with amorous cries, or angry  
cries,  
According to the wind, for all are blind.  
But now wind drops, dust settles ;  
thereupon  
There lurches past, his great eyes  
without thought  
Under the shadow of stupid straw-  
pale locks,  
That insolent fiend Robert Artisson  
To whom the love-lorn Lady Kyteler  
brought  
Bronzed peacock feathers, red combs  
of her cocks.

## THE WHEEL

THROUGH winter-time we call on  
spring,  
And through the spring on summer call,  
And when abounding hedges ring  
Declare that winter's best of all ;  
And after that there's nothing good  
Because the spring-time has not  
come—  
Nor know that what disturbs our  
blood  
Is but its longing for the tomb.

## YOUTH AND AGE

MUCH did I rage when young,  
Being by the world oppressed,  
But now with flattering tongue  
It speeds the parting guest.

1924

## THE NEW FACES

If you, that have grown old, were the  
first dead,  
Neither catalpa tree nor scented lime  
Should hear my living feet, nor would  
I tread  
Where we wrought that shall break  
the teeth of time.  
Let the new faces play what tricks  
they will  
In the old rooms ; night can out-  
balance day,  
Our shadows rove the garden gravel  
still,  
The living seem more shadowy than  
they.

## A PRAYER FOR MY SON

**BID a strong ghost stand at the head  
That my Michael may sleep sound,  
Nor cry, nor turn in the bed  
Till his morning meal come round ;  
And may departing twilight keep  
All dread afar till morning's back,  
That his mother may not lack  
Her fill of sleep.**

**Bid the ghost have sword in fist :  
Some there are, for I avow  
Such devilish things exist,  
Who have planned his murder for  
they know  
Of some most haughty deed or thought  
That waits upon his future days,  
And would through hatred of the bays  
Bring that to nought.**

46 A PRAYER FOR MY SON

Though You can fashion everything  
From nothing every day, and teach  
The morning stars to sing,  
You have lacked articulate speech  
To tell Your simplest want, and known,  
Wailing upon a woman's knee,  
All of that worst ignominy  
Of flesh and bone ;

And when through all the town there  
ran

The servants of Your enemy,  
A woman and a man,  
Unless the Holy Writings lie,  
Hurried through the smooth and rough  
And through the fertile and waste,  
Protecting, till the danger past,  
With human love.

## TWO SONGS FROM A PLAY

### I

I SAW a staring virgin stand  
Where holy Dionysus died,  
And tear the heart out of his side,  
And lay the heart upon her hand  
And bear that beating heart away ;  
And then did all the Muses sing  
Of Magnus Annus at the spring,  
As though God's death were but a play.

Another Troy must rise and set,  
Another lineage feed the crow,  
Another Argo's painted prow  
Drive to a flashier bauble yet.  
The Roman Empire stood appalled :  
It dropped the reins of peace and war  
When that fierce virgin and her Star  
Out of the fabulous darkness called.

48 TWO SONGS FROM A PLAY

II

In pity for man's darkening thought  
He walked that room and issued thence  
In Galilean turbulence ;  
The Babylonian Starlight brought  
A fabulous, formless darkness in ;  
Odour of blood when Christ was slain  
Made Plato's tolerance in vain  
And vain the Doric discipline.



## WISDOM

THE true faith discovered was  
When painted panel, statuary,  
Glass-mosaic, window-glass,  
Straightened all that went awry  
When some peasant gospeller  
Imagined Him upon the floor  
Of a working-carpenter.  
Miracle had its playtime where  
In damask clothed and on a seat,  
Chryselephantine, cedar boarded,  
His majestic Mother sat  
Stitching at a purple hoarded,  
That He might be nobly breeched,  
In starry towers of Babylon  
Noah's freshet never reached.  
King Abundance got Him on  
Innocence ; and Wisdom He.

That cognomen sounded best  
Considering what wild infancy  
Drove horror from His Mother's  
breast.

## LEDA AND THE SWAN

A SUDDEN blow : the great wings  
beating still  
Above the staggering girl, her thighs  
caressed  
By the dark webs, her nape caught in  
his bill,  
He holds her helpless breast upon his  
breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers  
push  
The feathered glory from her loosening  
thighs ?  
And how can body, laid in that white  
rush  
But feel the strange heart beating  
where it lies ?

52 LEDA AND THE SWAN

A shudder in the loins engenders there  
The broken wall, the burning roof and  
tower

And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,  
So mastered by the brute blood of the  
air,

Did she put on his knowledge with his  
power

Before the indifferent beak could let  
her drop ?

ON A PICTURE OF A BLACK  
CENTAUR BY EDMOND DULAC

YOUR hooves have stamped at the  
black margin of the wood,  
Even where horrible green parrots call  
and swing.

My works are all stamped down into  
the sultry mud.

I knew that horse play, knew it for a  
murderous thing.

What wholesome sun has ripened is  
wholesome food to eat

And that alone; yet I, being driven  
half insane

Because of some green wing, gathered  
old mummy wheat

In the mad abstract dark and ground  
it grain by grain

54      A BLACK CENTAUR

And after baked it slowly in an oven ;  
but now  
I bring full flavoured wine out of a  
barrel found  
Where seven Ephesian toppers slept  
and never knew  
When Alexander's empire past, they  
slept so sound.  
Stretch out your limbs and sleep a  
long Saturnian sleep ;  
I have loved you better than my soul  
for all my words,  
And there is none so fit to keep a  
watch and keep  
Unwearied eyes upon those horrible  
green birds.

## AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

### I

I WALK through the long schoolroom  
questioning,  
A kind old nun in a white hood replies ;  
The children learn to cipher and to  
sing,  
To study reading-books and history,  
To cut and sew, be neat in everything  
In the best modern way—the chil-  
dren's eyes  
In momentary wonder stare upon  
A sixty year old smiling public man.

### II

I dream of a Ledæan <sup>bird</sup> body, bent  
Above a sinking fire, a tale that she

56 AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

Told of a harsh reproof, or trivial event  
That changed some childish day to  
tragedy—  
Told, and it seemed that our two  
natures blent  
Into a sphere from youthful sympathy,  
Or else, to alter Plato's parable,  
Into the yolk and white of the one  
shell.

III

And thinking of that fit of grief or  
rage  
I look upon one child or t'other there  
And wonder if she stood so at that  
age—  
For even daughters of the swan can  
share  
Something of every paddler's heri-  
tage—  
And had that colour upon cheek or  
hair



AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN 57

And thereupon my heart is driven wild:  
She stands before me as a living child.

IV

Her present image floats in to the  
mind—

Did quattrocento finger fashion it  
Hollow of cheek as though it drank  
the wind

And took a mass of shadows for its  
meat ?

And I though never of Ledæan kind  
Had pretty plumage once—enough of  
that,

Better to smile on all that smile, and  
show

There is a comfortable kind of old  
scarecrow.

V

What youthful mother, a shape upon  
her lap

58 AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

Honey of generation had betrayed,  
And that must sleep, shriek, struggle  
to escape  
As recollection or the drug decide,  
Would think her son, did she but see  
that shape  
With sixty or more winters on its  
head,  
A compensation for the pang of his  
birth,  
Or the uncertainty of his setting  
forth ?

VI

Plato thought nature but a spume  
that plays  
Upon a ghostly paradigm of things ;  
Solider Aristotle played the taws  
Upon the bottom of a king of kings ;  
World-famous golden-thighed Pytha-  
goras  
Fingered upon a fiddle stick or strings

AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN 59

What a star sang and careless Muses  
heard :  
Old clothes upon old sticks to scare  
a bird.

VII

Both nuns and mothers worship images,  
But those the candles light are not as  
those  
That animate a mother's reveries,  
But keep a marble or a bronze repose.  
And yet they too break hearts — O  
Presences  
That passion, piety or affection knows,  
And that all heavenly glory sym-  
bolise—  
O self-born mockers of man's enter-  
prise ;

VIII

Labour is blossoming or dancing where  
The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,

60 AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

Nor beauty born out of its own  
despair,

Nor bleary-eyed wisdom out of midnight  
oil.

O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the  
bole ?

O body swayed to music, O brighten-  
ing glance,

How can we know the dancer from the  
dance ?

## COLONUS' PRAISE

(From 'Oedipus at Colonus')

### CHORUS

COME praise Colonus' horses and come

praise  
The ~~wine dark~~ of the wood's intricacies,

The nightingale that deafens daylight there,

If daylight ever visit where,  
Unvisited by tempest or by sun,  
Immortal ladies tread the ground  
Dizzy with harmonious sound,  
Semele's lad a gay companion.

And yonder in the gymnasts' garden  
thrives

The self-sown, self-begotten shape that  
gives  
Athenian intellect its mastery,  
Even the grey-leaved olive tree  
Miracle-bred out of the living stone ;  
Nor accident of peace nor war  
Shall wither that old marvel, for  
The great grey-eyed Athene stares  
thereon.

Who comes into this country, and has  
come  
Where golden crocus and narcissus  
bloom,  
Where the Great Mother, mourning  
for her daughter  
And beauty-drunken by the water  
Glittering among grey-leaved olive  
trees,  
Has plucked a flower and sung her loss ;  
Who finds abounding Cephisus  
Has found the loveliest spectacle there  
is.

COLONUS' PRAISE 63

Because this country has a pious mind  
And so remembers that when all  
    mankind  
But trod the road, or paddled by the  
    shore,  
Poseidon gave it bit and oar,  
Every Colonus lad or lass discourses  
Of that oar and of that bit ;  
Summer and winter, day and night,  
Of horses and horses of the sea, white  
    horses.

THE HERO, THE GIRL, AND  
THE FOOL

THE GIRL

I RAGE at my own image in the glass,  
That's so unlike myself that when you  
praise it  
It is as though you praised another,  
or even  
Mocked me with praise of my mere  
opposite ;  
And when I wake towards morn I  
dread myself  
For the heart cries that what deception  
wins  
Cruelty must keep ; therefore be  
warned and go  
If you have seen that image and not  
the woman.



HERO, GIRL, AND FOOL 65

THE HERO

I have raged at my own strength  
because you have loved it.

THE GIRL

If you are no more strength than I am  
beauty  
I had better find a convent and turn  
nun ;  
A nun at least has all men's rever-  
ence  
And needs no cruelty.

THE HERO

I have heard one say  
That men have reverence for their  
holiness  
And not themselves.

THE GIRL

Say on and say  
That only God has loved us for ourselves,  
But what care I that long for a man's  
love ?

THE FOOL BY THE ROADSIDE

When my days that have  
From cradle run to grave  
From grave to cradle run instead ;  
When thoughts that a fool  
Has wound upon a spool  
Are but loose thread, are but loose  
thread.

When cradle and spool are past  
And I mere shade at last  
Coagulate of stuff  
Transparent like the wind,  
I think that I may find  
A faithful love, a faithful love.

OWEN AHERN AND HIS  
DANCERS

I

A STRANGE thing surely that my heart  
when love had come unsought  
Upon the Norman upland or in that  
poplar shade,  
Should find no burden but itself and  
yet should be worn out.  
It could not bear that burden and  
therefore it went mad.

The south wind brought it longing, and  
the east wind despair,  
The west wind made it pitiful, and the  
north wind afraid.  
It feared to give its love a hurt with all  
the tempest there ;

It feared the hurt that she could give  
and therefore it went mad.

I can exchange opinion with any  
neighbouring mind,  
I have as healthy flesh and blood as  
any rhymer's had,  
But oh my Heart could bear no more  
when the upland caught the wind ;  
I ran, I ran, from my love's side  
because my Heart went mad.

## II

The Heart behind its rib laughed out,  
' You have called me mad,' it said.  
' Because I made you turn away and  
run from that young child ;  
How could she mate with fifty years  
that was so wildly bred ?  
Let the cage bird and the cage bird  
mate and the wild bird mate in  
the wild.'

‘ You but imagine lies all day, O  
murderer,’ I replied.

‘ And all those lies have but one end  
poor wretches to betray ;

I did not find in any cage the woman  
at my side.

O but her heart would break to learn  
my thoughts are far away.’

‘ Speak all your mind,’ my Heart sang  
out, ‘ speak all your mind ; who  
cares,

Now that your tongue cannot persuade  
the child till she mistake

Her childish gratitude for love and  
match your fifty years.

O let her choose a young man now and  
all for his wild sake.’

## A MAN YOUNG AND OLD

### FIRST LOVE

THOUGH nurtured like the sailing moon  
In beauty's murderous brood,  
She walked awhile and blushed awhile  
And on my pathway stood  
Until I thought her body bore  
A heart of flesh and blood.

But since I laid a hand thereon  
And found a heart of stone  
I have attempted many things  
And not a thing is done,  
For every hand is lunatic  
That travels on the moon.

She smiled and that transfigured me  
And left me but a lout,

A MAN YOUNG AND OLD 71

Maundering here, and maundering  
there,  
Emptier of thought  
Than heavenly circuit of its stars  
When the moon sails out.

HUMAN DIGNITY

Like the moon her kindness is,  
If kindness I may call  
What has no comprehension in't,  
But is the same for all  
As though my sorrow were a scene  
Upon a painted wall.

So like a bit of stone I lie  
Under a broken tree.  
I could recover if I shrieked  
My heart's agony  
To passing bird, but I am dumb  
From human dignity.

## 72 A MAN YOUNG AND OLD

### THE MERMAID

A mermaid found a swimming lad,  
Picked him for her own,  
Pressed her body to his body,  
Laughed ; and plunging down  
Forgot in cruel happiness  
That even lovers drown.

### THE DEATH OF THE HARE

I have pointed out the yelling pack,  
The hare leap to the wood,  
And when I pass a compliment  
Rejoice as lover should  
At the drooping of an eye  
At the mantling of the blood.

Then suddenly my heart is wrung  
By her distracted air  
And I remember wildness lost  
And after, swept from there,  
Am set down standing in the wood  
At the death of the hare.



## A MAN YOUNG AND OLD 73

### THE EMPTY CUP

A crazy man that found a cup,  
When all but dead of thirst,  
Hardly dared to wet his mouth  
Imagining, moon accursed,  
That another mouthful  
And his beating heart would burst.  
October last I found it too  
But found it dry as bone,  
And for that reason am I crazed  
And my sleep is gone.

### HIS MEMORIES

We should be hidden from their  
eyes,  
Being but holy shows  
And bodies broken like a thorn  
Whereon the bleak north blows,  
To think of buried Hector  
And that none living knows.

74 A MAN YOUNG AND OLD

The women take so little stock  
In what I do or say  
They'd sooner leave their cosseting  
To hear a jackass bray ;  
My arms are like the twisted thorn  
And yet there beauty lay ;

The first of all the tribe lay there  
And did such pleasure take—  
She who had brought great Hector  
down  
And put all Troy to wreck—  
That she cried into this ear  
Strike me if I shriek.

THE FRIENDS OF HIS YOUTH

Laughter not time destroyed my  
voice  
And put that crack in it,  
And when the moon's pot-bellied  
I get a laughing fit,

## A MAN YOUNG AND OLD 75

For that old Madge comes down the lane  
A stone upon her breast,  
And a cloak wrapped about the stone,  
And she can get no rest  
With singing hush and hush-a-bye ;  
She that has been wild  
And barren as a breaking wave  
Thinks that the stone's a child.  
And Peter that had great affairs  
And was a pushing man  
Shrieks ' I am King of the Peacocks,'  
And perches on a stone ;  
And then I laugh till tears run down  
And the heart thumps at my side,  
Remembering that her shriek was love  
And that he shrieks from pride.

## SUMMER AND SPRING

We sat under an old thorn-tree  
And talked away the night,  
Told all that had been said or done  
Since first we saw the light,

76 A MAN YOUNG AND OLD

And when we talked of growing up  
Knew that we'd halved a soul  
And fell the one in t'other's arms  
That we might make it whole ;  
Then Peter had a murdering look  
For it seemed that he and she  
Had spoken of their childish days  
Under that very tree.  
O what a bursting out there was,  
And what a blossoming,  
When we had all the summer time  
And she had all the spring.

THE SECRETS OF THE OLD

I have old women's secrets now  
That had those of the young ;  
Madge tells me what I dared not  
think  
When my blood was strong,  
And what had drowned a lover once  
Sounds like an old song.

A MAN YOUNG AND OLD 77

Though Margery is stricken dumb  
If thrown in Madge's way,  
We three make up a solitude ;  
For none alive to-day  
Can know the stories that we know  
Or say the things we say :

How such a man pleased women  
most  
Of all that are gone,  
How such a pair loved many years  
And such a pair but one,  
Stories of the bed of straw  
Or the bed of down.

HIS WILDNESS

O bid me mount and sail up there  
Amid the cloudy wrack,  
For Peg and Meg and Paris' love  
That had so straight a back,  
Are gone away, and some that stay,  
Have changed their silk for sack.

78 A MAN YOUNG AND OLD

Were I but there and none to hear  
I'd have a peacock cry  
For that is natural to a man  
That lives in memory,  
Being all alone I'd nurse a stone  
And sing it lullaby.

## THE THREE MONUMENTS

THEY hold their public meetings where  
Our most renowned patriots stand,  
One among the birds of the air,  
A stumpier on either hand ;  
And all the popular statesmen say  
That purity built up the state  
And after kept it from decay ;  
Admonish us to cling to that  
And let all base ambition be,  
For intellect would make us proud  
And pride bring in impurity :  
The three old rascals laugh aloud.

FROM 'OEDIPUS AT COLONUS'

I

ENDURE what life God gives and ask no  
longer span ;  
Cease to remember the delights of  
youth, travel-wearied aged man ;  
Delight becomes death-longing if all  
longing else be vain.

II

Even from that delight memory  
treasures so,  
Death, despair, division of families,  
all entanglements of mankind  
grow,  
As that old wandering beggar and  
these God-hated children know.



III

In the long echoing street the laughing  
dancers throng,  
The bride is carried to the bridegroom's  
chamber through torchlight and  
tumultuous song ;  
I celebrate the silent kiss that ends  
short life or long.

IV

Never to have lived is best, ancient  
writers say ;  
Never to have drawn the breath of life,  
never to have looked into the eye  
of day ;  
The second best's a gay goodnight and  
quickly turn away.

**THE GIFT OF HARUN  
AL-RASHID**

**KUSTA BEN LUKA** is my name, I write  
To Abd Al-Rabban ; fellow roysterer  
once,  
Now the good Caliph's learned  
Treasurer,  
And for no ear but his.

Carry this letter  
Through the great gallery of the  
Treasure House  
Where banners of the Caliphs hang,  
night-coloured  
But brilliant as the night's embroidery,  
And wait war's music ; pass the little  
gallery ;  
Pass books of learning from Byzantium  
Written in gold upon a purple stain,

## GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID 83

And pause at last, I was about to say,  
At the great book of Sappho's song ;  
    but no,  
For should you leave my letter there,  
    a boy's  
Love-lorn, indifferent hands might  
    come upon it  
And let it fall unnoticed to the floor.  
Pause at the Treatise of Parmenides  
And hide it there, for Caliphs to  
    world's end  
Must keep that perfect, as they keep  
    her song  
So great its fame.

    When fitting time has passed  
The parchment will disclose to some  
    learned man  
A mystery that else had found no  
    chronicler  
But the wild Bedouin. Though I  
    approve  
Those wanderers that welcomed in  
    their tents

84 GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID

What great Harun Al-Rashid, occupied  
With Persian embassy or Grecian  
war,

Must needs neglect ; I cannot hide  
the truth

That wandering in a desert, featureless  
As air under a wing, can give birds'  
wit.

In after time they will speak much of  
me

And speak but phantasy. Recall the  
year

When our beloved Caliph put to death  
His Vizir Jaffer for an unknown  
reason ;

'If but the shirt upon my body  
knew it

I'd tear it off and throw it in the  
fire.'

That speech was all that the town  
knew, but he

Seemed for a while to have grown  
young again ;

GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID 85

Seemed so on purpose, muttered  
    Jaffer's friends,  
That none might know that he was  
    conscience struck—  
But that's a traitor's thought.  
    Enough for me  
That in the early summer of the year  
The mightiest of the princes of the  
    world  
Came to the least considered of his  
    courtiers ;  
Sat down upon the fountain's marble  
    edge  
One hand amid the goldfish in the  
    pool ;  
And thereupon a colloquy took place  
That I commend to all the chroniclers  
To show how violent great hearts can  
    lose  
Their bitterness and find the honey-  
    comb.  
' I have brought a slender bride into  
    the house ;

86 GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID

You know the saying "Change the  
bride with Spring",  
And she and I, being sunk in happi-  
ness,  
Cannot endure to think you tread  
these paths,  
When evening stirs the jasmine, and yet  
Are brideless.'

' I am falling into years.'

' But such as you and I do not seem old  
Like men who live by habit. Every  
day  
I ride with falcon to the river's edge  
Or carry the ringed mail upon my back,  
Or court a woman ; neither enemy,  
Game-bird, nor woman does the same  
thing twice ;  
And so a hunter carries in the eye  
A mimicry of youth. Can poet's  
thought  
That springs from body and in body  
falls

GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID 87

Like this pure jet, now lost amid blue  
sky

Now bathing lily leaf and fishes' scale,  
Be mimicry ?'

' What matter if our souls  
Are nearer to the surface of the body  
Than souls that start no game and  
turn no rhyme !

The soul's own youth and not the  
body's youth

Shows through our lineaments. My  
candle's bright,

My lantern is too loyal not to show  
That it was made in your great  
father's reign.'

' And yet the jasmine season warms  
our blood.'

' Great prince, forgive the freedom of  
my speech ;

You think that love has seasons, and  
you think

## 88 GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID

That if the spring bear off what the  
spring gave  
The heart need suffer no defeat ; but I  
Who have accepted the Byzantine  
faith,  
That seems unnatural to Arabian  
minds,  
Think when I choose a bride I choose  
for ever ;  
And if her eye should not grow bright  
for mine  
Or brighten only for some younger eye,  
My heart could never turn from daily  
ruin,  
Nor find a remedy.'

‘ But what if I  
Have lit upon a woman, who so shares  
Your thirst for those old crabbed  
mysteries,  
So strains to look beyond our life, an  
eye  
That never knew that strain would  
scarce seem bright,



GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID 89

And yet herself can seem youth's very  
fountain,

Being all brimmed with life.'

' Were it but true

I would have found the best that life  
can give,

Companionship in those mysterious  
things

That make a man's soul or a woman's  
soul

Itself and not some other soul.'

' That love

Must needs be in this life and in what  
follows

Unchanging and at peace, and it is right  
Every philosopher should praise that  
love.

But I being none can praise its  
opposite.

It makes my passion stronger but to  
think

Like passion stirs the peacock and his  
mate,

## 90 GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID

The wild stag and the doe; that  
mouth to mouth  
Is a man's mockery of the changeless  
soul.'  
And thereupon his bounty gave what  
now  
Can shake more blossom from autumnal  
chill  
Than all my bursting springtime knew.  
A girl  
Perched in some window of her  
mother's house  
Had watched my daily passage to and  
fro ;  
Had heard impossible history of my  
past ;  
Imagined some impossible history  
Lived at my side ; thought time's  
disfiguring touch  
Gave but more reason for a woman's  
care.  
Yet was it love of me, or was it  
love

---

GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID 91

Of the stark mystery that has dazed  
my sight,  
Perplexed her phantasy and planned  
her care ?  
Or did the torchlight of that mystery  
Pick out my features in such light and  
shade  
Two contemplating passions chose one  
theme  
Through sheer bewilderment ? She  
had not paced  
The garden paths, nor counted up the  
rooms,  
Before she had spread a book upon  
her knees  
And asked about the pictures or the  
text ;  
And often those first days I saw her  
stare  
On old dry writing in a learned  
tongue,  
On old dry faggots that could never  
please

## 92 GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID

The extravagance of spring ; or move  
a hand

As if that writing or the figured page  
Were some dear cheek.

Upon a moonless night  
I sat where I could watch her sleeping  
form,

And wrote by candle - light ; but her  
form moved,

And fearing that my light disturbed  
her sleep

I rose that I might screen it with a  
cloth.

I heard her voice, ' Turn that I may  
expound

What's bowed your shoulder and made  
pale your cheek ' ;

And saw her sitting upright on the  
bed ;

Or was it she that spoke or some great  
Djinn ?

I say that a Djinn spoke. A live-long  
hour

GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID 93

She seemed the learned man and I the  
child ;  
Truths without father came, truths  
that no book  
Of all the uncounted books that I have  
read,  
Nor thought out of her mind or mine  
begot,  
Self - born, high - born, and solitary  
truths,  
Those terrible implacable straight lines  
Drawn through the wandering vege-  
tative dream,  
Even those truths that when my bones  
are dust  
Must drive the Arabian host.

The voice grew still,  
And she lay down upon her bed and slept,  
But woke at the first gleam of day,  
rose up  
And swept the house and sang about  
her work  
In childish ignorance of all that passed.

94 GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID

A dozen nights of natural sleep, and  
then

When the full moon swam to its  
greatest height

She rose, and with her eyes shut fast  
in sleep

Walked through the house. Un-  
noticed and unfelt

I wrapped her in a heavy hooded  
cloak, and she,

Half running, dropped at the first  
ridge of the desert

And there marked out those emblems  
on the sand

That day by day I study and marvel at,  
With her white finger. I led her home  
asleep

And once again she rose and swept the  
house

In childish ignorance of all that passed.  
Even to-day, after some seven years

When maybe thrice in every moon her  
mouth

---

GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID 95

Murmured the wisdom of the desert  
Djinns,  
She keeps that ignorance, nor has  
she now  
That first unnatural interest in my  
books.  
It seems enough that I am there ;  
and yet  
Old fellow student, whose most patient  
ear  
Heard all the anxiety of my passionate  
youth,  
It seems I must buy knowledge with  
my peace.  
What if she lose her ignorance and so  
Dream that I love her only for the  
voice,  
That every gift and every word of  
praise  
Is but a payment for that midnight  
voice  
That is to age what milk is to a  
child !

96 GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID

Were she to lose her love, because she  
had lost

Her confidence in mine, or even lose  
Its first simplicity, love, voice and all,  
All my fine feathers would be plucked  
away

And I left shivering. The voice has  
drawn

A quality of wisdom from her love's  
Particular quality. The signs and  
shapes ;

All those abstractions that you fancied  
were

From the great treatise of Parmenides ;  
All, all those gyres and cubes and  
midnight things

Are but a new expression of her body  
Drunk with the bitter sweetness of her  
youth.

And now my utmost mystery is out.  
A woman's beauty is a storm-tossed  
banner ;

Under it wisdom stands, and I alone—



**GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID 97**

**Of all Arabia's lovers I alone—  
Nor dazzled by the embroidery, nor  
lost  
In the confusion of its night-dark  
folds,  
Can hear the armed man speak.**

**1923**

## ALL SOULS' NIGHT

AN EPILOGUE TO 'A VISION'

MIDNIGHT has come and the great  
Christ Church Bell,  
And many a lesser bell, sound through  
the room ;  
And it is All Souls' Night,  
And two long glasses brimmed with  
muscatel  
Bubble upon the table. A ghost may  
come ;  
For it is a ghost's right,  
His element is so fine  
Being sharpened by his death,  
To drink from the wine-breath  
While our gross palates drink from  
the whole wine.

ALL SOULS' NIGHT 99

I need some mind that, if the cannon  
    sound  
From every quarter of the world, can  
    stay  
Wound in mind's pondering,  
As mummies in the mummy-cloth are  
    wound ;  
Because I have a marvellous thing to  
    say,  
A certain marvellous thing  
None but the living mock,  
Though not for sober ear ;  
It may be all that hear  
Should laugh and weep an hour upon  
    the clock.

H—'s the first I call. He loved  
    strange thought  
And knew that sweet extremity of  
    pride  
That's called platonic love,  
And that to such a pitch of passion  
    wrought

100 ALL SOULS' NIGHT

Nothing could bring him, when his  
lady died,  
Anodyne for his love.  
Words were but wasted breath ;  
One dear hope had he :  
The inclemency  
Of that or the next winter would be  
death.

Two thoughts were so mixed up I  
could not tell  
Whether of her or God he thought the  
most,  
But think that his mind's eye,  
When upward turned, on one sole  
image fell ;  
And that a slight companionable ghost,  
Wild with divinity,  
Had so lit up the whole  
Immense miraculous house,  
The Bible promised us,  
It seemed a gold-fish swimming in a  
bowl.

ALL SOULS' NIGHT 101

On Florence Emery I call the next,  
Who finding the first wrinkles on a face  
Admired and beautiful,  
And knowing that the future would  
    be vexed  
With 'minished beauty, multiplied  
    commonplace,  
Preferred to teach a school,  
Away from neighbour or friend  
Among dark skins, and there  
Permit foul years to wear  
Hidden from eyesight to the un-  
    noticed end.

Before that end much had she ravelled  
    out  
From a discourse in figurative speech  
By some learned Indian  
On the soul's journey. How it is  
    whirled about,  
Wherever the orbit of the moon can  
    reach,  
Until it plunge into the sun ;

102      ALL SOULS' NIGHT

And there, free and yet fast  
Being both Chance and Choice,  
Forget its broken toys  
And sink into its own delight at last.

And I call up MacGregor from the  
    grave,  
For in my first hard springtime we  
    were friends,  
Although of late estranged.  
I thought him half a lunatic, half  
    knave,  
And told him so, but friendship never  
    ends ;  
And what if mind seem changed,  
And it seem changed with the mind,  
When thoughts rise up unbid  
On generous things that he did  
And I grow half contented to be blind.

He had much industry at setting out,  
Much boisterous courage, before loneli-  
    ness

ALL SOULS' NIGHT 103

Had driven him crazed ;  
For meditations upon unknown  
thought  
Make human intercourse grow less and  
less ;  
They are neither paid nor praised.  
But he'd object to the host,  
The glass because my glass ;  
A ghost-lover he was  
And may have grown more arrogant  
being a ghost.

But names are nothing. What matter  
who it be,  
So that his elements have grown so  
fine  
The fume of muscatel  
Can give his sharpened palate ecstasy  
No living man can drink from the  
whole wine.  
I have mummy truths to tell  
Whereat the living mock,  
Though not for sober ear,

104      ALL SOULS' NIGHT

For maybe all that hear  
Should laugh and weep an hour upon  
the clock.

Such thought — such thought have I  
that hold it tight  
Till meditation master all its parts,  
Nothing can stay my glance  
Until that glance run in the world's  
despite  
To where the damned have howled  
away their hearts,  
And where the blessed dance ;  
Such thought, that in it bound  
I need no other thing  
Wound in mind's wandering,  
As mummies in the mummy-cloth are  
wound.



## NOTES

### SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

#### STANZA IV

I HAVE read somewhere that in the Emperor's palace at Byzantium was a tree made of gold and silver, and artificial birds that sang.

#### THE TOWER. PART II

The persons mentioned are associated by legend, story and tradition with the neighbourhood of Thoor Ballylee or Ballylee Castle, where the poem was written. Mrs. French lived at Peterswell in the eighteenth century and was related to Sir Jonah Barrington, who described the incident of the ear and the trouble that came of it. The peasant beauty and the blind poet are Mary Hynes and Raftery, and the incident of the man drowned in Cloone Bog is recorded in my *Celtic Twilight*. Hanrahan's

pursuit of the phantom hare and hounds is from my *Stories of Red Hanrahan*. The ghosts have been seen at their game of dice in what is now my bedroom, and the old bankrupt man lived about a hundred years ago. According to one legend he could only leave the Castle upon a Sunday because of his creditors, and according to another he hid in the secret passage.

### THE TOWER. PART III

In the passage about the Swan I have unconsciously echoed one of the loveliest lyrics of our time—Mr. Sturge Moore's 'Dying Swan'. I often recited it during an American lecturing tour, which explains the theft.

### THE DYING SWAN

O silver-throated Swan  
Struck, struck! A golden dart  
Clean through thy breast has gone  
Home to thy heart.  
Thrill, thrill, O silver throat!  
O silver trumpet, pour  
Love for defiance back

On him who smote !  
And brim, brim o'er  
With love ; and ruby-dye thy track  
Down thy last living reach  
Of river, sail the golden light—  
Enter the sun's heart—even teach,  
O wondrous-gifted pain, teach thou  
The God to love, let him learn how !

When I wrote the lines about Plato and Plotinus I forgot that it is something in our own eyes that makes us see them as all transcendence. Has not Plotinus written : ' Let every soul recall, then, at the outset the truth that soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed the life into them all, whatever is nourished by earth and sea, all the creatures of the air, the divine stars in the sky ; it is the maker of the sun ; itself formed and ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion — and it is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honourable than they, for they gather or dissolve as soul brings them life or abandons them, but soul, since it never can abandon itself, is of eternal being '.

**MEDITATIONS IN TIME OF  
CIVIL WAR**

These poems were written at Thoor Ballylee in 1922, during the civil war. Before they were finished the Republicans blew up our 'ancient bridge' one midnight. They forbade us to leave the house, but were otherwise polite, even saying at last 'Goodnight, thank you' as though we had given them the bridge.

**SECTION SIX**

In the West of Ireland we call a startling a stare, and during the civil war one built in a hole in the masonry by my bedroom window.

**SECTION SEVEN, STANZA II**

The cry 'Vengeance on the murderers of Jacques Molay', Grand Master of the Templars, seems to me fit symbol for those who labour from hatred, and so for sterility in various kinds. It is said to have been incorporated in the ritual of certain Masonic societies of the eighteenth century, and to have fed class-hatred.

## SECTION SEVEN, STANZA IV

I have a ring with a hawk and a butterfly upon it, to symbolise the straight road of logic, and so of mechanism, and the crooked road of intuition : ' For wisdom is a butterfly and not a gloomy bird of prey '.

## NINETEEN HUNDRED AND NINETEEN

## SECTION SIX

The country people see at times certain apparitions whom they name now ' fallen angels ', now ' ancient inhabitants of the country ', and describe as riding at whiles ' with flowers upon the heads of the horses '. I have assumed in the sixth poem that these horsemen, now that the times worsen, give way to worse. My last symbol, Robert Artisson, was an evil spirit much run after in Kilkenny at the start of the fourteenth century. Are not those who travel in the whirling dust also in the Platonic Year ?

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to the Apostles after the Resurrection, a play intended for performance in a drawing-room or studio.

### AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

#### STANZA III

I have taken 'the honey of generation' from Porphyry's essay on 'The Cave of the Nymphs', but find no warrant in Porphyry for considering it the 'drug' that destroys the 'recollection' of pre-natal freedom. He blamed a cup of oblivion given in the zodiacal sign of Cancer.

### THE GIFT OF HARUN AL-RASHID

Part of an unfinished set of poems, dialogues and stories about John Ahern and Michael Robartes, Kusta ben Luka, a philosopher of Bagdad, and his Bedouin followers.

THE END

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