

Sonnets



Light

Light, endless Light! Darkness has room no more,
Lips against gulfs quiver up their screaming;
The huge uniconscious depths unplumbed before
Lie glimmering in vast expectancy.

Light, timeless Light immutable and apart!
The holy sealed mysterious doors unclose.
Light, burning Light from the Infinite's diamond heart -
Quivers in my heart where blooms the deathless rose

Light in its rapture leaping through the nerves!
Light, brooding, Light! each smitten pulsionate cell
In a mad blaze of ecstatic presence
A burning sense of the Incomprehensible.

I move in an ocean of stupendous Light
Joining my depths to His eternal height.

1939 October

Sri Aurobindo

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Publisher's Note

Sri Aurobindo wrote seventy-four sonnets between 1933 and 1947. He noted once that he wanted them “published as a separate book of sonnets”. Such a book was first published posthumously in 1980 under the title *Sonnets*. It included, as an appendix, fourteen sonnets that he had written from around 1898 to 1909. Sri Aurobindo published only eight sonnets (six from the later period and two from the earlier) during his lifetime. The others are reproduced here from his manuscripts.

The present edition contains two different versions of “The Ways of the Spirit”. In the 1980 edition, only one version (different from the two reproduced here) was included.

Transformation

My breath runs in a subtle rhythmic stream;
 It fills my members with a might divine:
 I have drunk the Infinite like a giant's wine.
Time is my drama or my pageant dream.
Now are my illumined cells joy's flaming scheme
 And changed my thrilled and branching nerves to fine
 Channels of rapture opal and hyaline
For the influx of the Unknown and the Supreme.

I am no more a vassal of the flesh,
 A slave to Nature and her leaden rule;
 I am caught no more in the senses' narrow mesh.
My soul unhorizoned widens to measureless sight,
 My body is God's happy living tool,
 My spirit a vast sun of deathless light.

The Other Earths

An irised multitude of hills and seas,
 And glint of brooks in the green wilderness,
And trackless stars, and mirrored symphonies
 Of hues that float in ethers shadowless,

A dance of fireflies in the fretted gloom,
 In a pale midnight the moon's silver flare,
Fire-importunities of scarlet bloom
 And bright suddenness of wings in a golden air,

Strange bird and animal forms like memories cast
 On the rapt silence of unearthly woods,
Calm faces of the gods on backgrounds vast
 Bringing the marvel of the infinitudes,

Through glimmering veils of wonder and delight
World after world bursts on the awakened sight.

Nirvana

All is abolished but the mute Alone.

The mind from thought released, the heart from grief

Grow inexistent now beyond belief;

There is no I, no Nature, known-unknown.

The city, a shadow picture without tone,

Floats, quivers unreal; forms without relief

Flow, a cinema's vacant shapes; like a reef

Foundering in shoreless gulfs the world is done.

Only the illimitable Permanent

Is here. A Peace stupendous, featureless, still,

Replaces all, — what once was I, in It

A silent unnamed emptiness content

Either to fade in the Unknowable

Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinite.

Man the Thinking Animal

A trifling unit in a boundless plan
Amidst the enormous insignificance
Of the unpeopled cosmos' fire-whirl dance,
Earth, as by accident, engendered man,

A creature of his own grey ignorance,
A mind half shadow and half gleam, a breath
That wrestles, captive in a world of death,
To live some lame brief years. Yet his advance,

Attempt of a divinity within,
A consciousness in the inconscient Night,
To realise its own supernal Light,
Confronts the ruthless forces of the Unseen.

Aspiring to godhead from insensible clay
He travels slow-footed towards the eternal day.

Contrasts

What opposites are here! A trivial life
Specks the huge dream of Death called Matter; intense
In its struggle of weakness towards omnipotence,
A thinking mind starts from the unthinking strife

In the order of the electric elements.
Immortal life breathed in that monstrous death,
A mystery of Knowledge wore as sheath
Matter's mute nescience. Its enveloped sense

Or dumb somnambulist will obscurely reigns
Driving the atoms in their cosmic course
Whose huge unhearing movement serves perforce
The works of a strange blind omniscience.

The world's deep contrasts are but figures spun
Draping the unanimity of the One.

The Silver Call

There is a godhead of unrealised things
 To which Time's splendid gains are hoarded dross;
A cry seems near, a rustle of silver wings
 Calling to heavenly joy by earthly loss.

All eye has seen and all the ear has heard
 Is a pale illusion by some greater voice
And mightier vision; no sweet sound or word,
 No passion of hues that make the heart rejoice

Can equal those diviner ecstasies.
 A Mind beyond our mind has sole the ken
Of those yet unimagined harmonies,
 The fate and privilege of unborn men.

As rain-thrashed mire the marvel of the rose,
Earth waits that distant marvel to disclose.

Evolution [1]

I passed into a lucent still abode
 And saw as in a mirror crystalline
 An ancient Force ascending serpentine
The unhasting spirals of the aeonic road.
Earth was a cradle for the arriving god
 And man but a half-dark half-luminous sign
 Of the transition of the veiled Divine
From Matter's sleep and the tormented load

Of ignorant life and death to the Spirit's light.
 Mind liberated swam Light's ocean vast,
 And life escaped from its grey tortured line;
I saw Matter illumining its parent Night.
 The soul could feel into infinity cast
 Timeless God-bliss the heart incarnadine.

The Call of the Impossible

A godhead moves us to unrealised things.

Asleep in the wide folds of destiny,
A world guarded by Silence' rustling wings
Shelters their fine impossibility:

But parting quiver the caerulean gates;
Strange splendours look into our dreaming eyes;
We bear proud deities and magnificent fates;
Faces and hands come near from Paradise.

What shines above, waits darkling here in us:
Bliss unattained our future's birthright is,
Beauty of our dim souls grows amorous,
We are the heirs of infinite widenesses.

The impossible is our mask of things to be,
Mortal the door to immortality.

Evolution [2]

All is not finished in the unseen decree;
 A Mind beyond our mind demands our ken,
A life of unimagined harmony
 Awaits, concealed, the grasp of unborn men.

The crude beginnings of the lifeless earth,
 The mindless stirrings of the plant and tree
Prepared our thought; thought for a godlike birth
 Broadens the mould of our mortality.

A might no human will nor force can gain,
 A knowledge seated in eternity,
A bliss beyond our struggle and our pain
 Are the high pinnacles of our destiny.

O Thou who climb'dst to mind from the dull stone,
Face now the miracled summits still unwon.

Man the Mediator

A dumb Inconscient drew life's stumbling maze,
 A night of all things, packed and infinite:
It made our consciousness a torch that plays
 Between the Abyss and a supernal Light.

Our mind was framed a lens of segment sight
 Piecing out inch by inch the world's huge mass,
And reason a small hard theodolite
 Measuring unreally the measureless ways.

Yet is the dark Inconscient whence came all
 The self-same Power that shines on high unwon:
Our Night shall be a sky purpureal,
 Our torch transmute to a vast godhead's sun.

Rooted in mire heavenward man's nature grows, —
His soul the dim bud of God's flaming rose.

The Infinitesimal Infinite

Out of a still immensity we came.

These million universes were to it
The poor light-bubbles of a trivial game,
A fragile glimmer in the Infinite.

It could not find its soul in all that Vast:

It drew itself into a little speck
Infinitesimal, ignobly cast
Out of earth's mud and slime strangely awake, —

A tiny plasm upon a casual globe

In the small system of a dwarflike sun,
A little life wearing the flesh for robe,
A little mind winged through wide space to run.

It lived, it knew, it saw its self sublime,
Deathless, outmeasuring Space, outlasting Time.

Discoveries of Science

I saw the electric stream on which is run
 The world turned motes and spark-whirls of a Light,
A Fire of which the nebula and sun
 Are glints and flame-drops, scattered, eremite;

And veiled by viewless Light worked other Powers,
 An Air of movement endless, unbegun,
Expanding and contracting in Time's hours
 And the intangible ether of the One.

The surface finds, the screen-phenomenon,
 Are Nature's offered ransom, while behind
Her occult mysteries lie safe, unknown,
 From the crude handling of the empiric Mind.

Our truths discovered are but dust and trace
Of the eternal Energy in her race.

The Ways of the Spirit [1]

What points ascending Nature to her goal?
 'Tis not man's lame transcribing intellect
 With its carved figures rigid and erect
But the far subtle vision of his soul.

His instruments have served his weakness well
 But they must change to tread the paths of Fire
That lead through his calm self immeasurable
 To the last rapture's incandescent spire.

The spirit keeps for him its ample ways,
 A sense that takes the world into our being,
 A close illumined touch and intimate seeing,
Wide Thought that is a god's ensphering gaze,

A tranquil heart in sympathy with all,
A will wide-winged, armed, imperial.

The Ways of the Spirit [2]

Aroused from Matter's sleep when Nature strove
 Into the half lights of the embodied mind
 She left not all imprisonment behind
But trailed an ever lengthening chain, and the love

Of shadows and half lustres went with her.
 In timid mood were shaped our instruments;
 Horizon and surface barriered thought and sense,
Forbidden to look too high, too deep to peer.

An algebra of signs, a scheme of sense,
 A symbol language without depth or wings,
 A power to handle deftly outward things
Are our scant earnings of intelligence.

Yet towards a greater Nature paths she keeps
Threading the grandeur of her climbing steeps.

Science and the Unknowable

In occult depths grow Nature's roots unshown;
Each visible hides its base in the unseen,
Even the invisible guards what it can mean
In a yet deeper invisible, unknown.

Man's science builds abstractions cold and bare
And carves to formulas the living whole;
It is a brain and hand without a soul,
A piercing eye behind our outward stare.

The objects that we see are not their form,
A mass of forces is the apparent shape;
Pursued and seized, their inner lines escape
In a vast consciousness beyond our norm.

Follow and you shall meet abysses still,
Infinite, wayless, mute, unknowable.

The Yogi on the Whirlpool

On a dire whirlpool in the hurrying river,
 A life-stilled statue naked, bronze, severe,
 He kept the posture of a deathless seer
Unshaken by the mad water's leap and shiver.
Thought could not think in him, flesh could not quiver;
 The feet of Time could not adventure here;
 Only some unknown Power nude and austere,
Only a Silence mighty to deliver.

His spirit world-wide and companionless,
 Seated above the torrent of the days
 On the deep eddy that our being forms,
Silent sustained the huge creation's stress,
 Unchanged supporting Nature's rounds and norms,
 Immobile background of the cosmic race.

The Kingdom Within

There is a kingdom of the spirit's ease.

It is not in this helpless swirl of thought,
Foam from the world-sea or spray whispers caught,
With which we build mind's shifting symmetries,
Nor in life's stuff of passionate unease,
Nor the heart's unsure emotions frailly wrought
Nor trivial clipped sense-joys soon brought to nought,
Nor in this body's solid transiencies.

Wider behind than the vast universe

Our spirit scans the drama and the stir,
A peace, a light, an ecstasy, a power
Waiting at the end of blindness and the curse
That veils it from its ignorant minister
The grandeur of its free eternal hour.

Now I have borne

Now I have borne Thy presence and Thy light,
Eternity assumes me and I am
A vastness of tranquillity and flame,
My heart a deep Atlantic of delight.
My life is a moving moment of Thy might
Carrying Thy vision's sacred oriflamme
Inscribed with the white glory of Thy name
In the unborn silence of the Infinite.

My body is a jar of radiant peace,
The days a line across my timelessness,
My mind is made a voiceless breadth of Thee,
A lyre of muteness and a luminous sea;
Yet in each cell I feel Thy fire embrace,
A brazier of the seven ecstasies.

Electron

The electron on which forms and worlds are built,
 Leaped into being, a particle of God.
A spark from the eternal Energy spilt,
 It is the Infinite's blind minute abode.

In that small flaming chariot Shiva rides.
 The One devised innumerably to be;
His oneness in invisible forms he hides,
 Time's tiny temples to eternity.

Atom and molecule in their unseen plan
 Buttress an edifice of strange onenesses,
Crystal and plant, insect and beast and man, —
 Man on whom the World-Unity shall seize,

Widening his soul-spark to an epiphany
Of the timeless vastness of Infinity.

The Indwelling Universal

I contain the wide world in my soul's embrace:

 In me Arcturus and Belphegor burn.

 To whatsoever living form I turn

I see my own body with another face.

All eyes that look on me are my sole eyes;

 The one heart that beats within all breasts is mine.

 The world's happiness flows through me like wine,

Its million sorrows are my agonies.

Yet all its acts are only waves that pass

 Upon my surface; inly for ever still,

 Unborn I sit, timeless, intangible:

All things are shadows in my tranquil glass.

My vast transcendence holds the cosmic whirl;

I am hid in it as in the sea a pearl.

Bliss of Identity

All Nature is taught in radiant ways to move,
All beings are in myself embraced.
O fiery boundless Heart of joy and love,
How art thou beating in a mortal's breast!

It is Thy rapture flaming through my nerves
And all my cells and atoms thrill with Thee;
My body Thy vessel is and only serves
As a living wine-cup of Thy ecstasy.

I am a centre of Thy golden light
And I its vast and vague circumference;
Thou art my soul great, luminous and white
And Thine my mind and will and glowing sense.

Thy spirit's infinite breath I feel in me;
My life is a throb of Thy eternity.

The Witness Spirit

I dwell in the spirit's calm nothing can move
 And watch the actions of Thy vast world-force,
Its mighty wings that through infinity move
 And the Time-galloping of the deathless Horse.

This mute stupendous Energy that whirls
 The stars and nebulae in its long train,
Like a huge Serpent through my being curls
 With its diamond hood of joy and fangs of pain.

It rises from the dim inconscient deep
 Upcoiling through the minds and hearts of men,
Then touches on some height of luminous sleep
 The bliss and splendour of the eternal plane.

All this I bear in me, untouched and still,
Assenting to Thy all-wise inscrutable will.

The Hidden Plan

However long Night's hour, I will not dream
That the small ego and the person's mask
Are all that God reveals in our life-scheme,
The last result of Nature's cosmic task.

A greater Presence in her bosom works;
Long it prepares its far epiphany:
Even in the stone and beast the godhead lurks,
A bright Persona of eternity.

It shall burst out from the limit traced by Mind
And make a witness of the prescient heart;
It shall reveal even in this inert blind
Nature, long veiled in each inconscient part,

Fulfilling the occult magnificent plan,
The world-wide and immortal spirit in man.

The Pilgrim of the Night

I made an assignation with the Night;
 In the abyss was fixed our rendezvous:
In my breast carrying God's deathless light
 I came her dark and dangerous heart to woo.

I left the glory of the illumined Mind
 And the calm rapture of the divinised soul
And travelled through a vastness dim and blind
 To the grey shore where her ignorant waters roll.

I walk by the chill wave through the dull slime
 And still that weary journeying knows no end;
Lost is the lustrous godhead beyond Time,
 There comes no voice of the celestial Friend.

And yet I know my footprints' track shall be
A pathway towards Immortality.

Cosmic Consciousness

I have wrapped the wide world in my wider self
And Time and Space my spirit's seeing are.
I am the god and demon, ghost and elf,
I am the wind's speed and the blazing star.

All Nature is the nursling of my care,
I am the struggle and the eternal rest;
The world's joy thrilling runs through me, I bear
The sorrow of millions in my lonely breast.

I have learned a close identity with all,
Yet am by nothing bound that I become;
Carrying in me the universe's call
I mount to my imperishable home.

I pass beyond Time and life on measureless wings,
Yet still am one with born and unborn things.

Liberation [1]

I have thrown from me the whirling dance of mind
And stand now in the spirit's silence free;
Timeless and deathless beyond creature kind,
The centre of my own eternity.

I have escaped and the small self is dead;
I am immortal, alone, ineffable;
I have gone out from the universe I made,
And have grown nameless and immeasurable.

My mind is hushed in wide and endless light,
My heart a solitude of delight and peace,
My sense unsnared by touch and sound and sight,
My body a point in white infinities.

I am the one Being's sole immobile Bliss:
No one I am, I who am all that is.

The Inconscient

Out of a seeming void and dark-winged sleep

Of dim inconscient infinity

A Power arose from the insentient deep,

A flame-whirl of magician Energy.

Some huge somnambulist Intelligence

Devising without thought process and plan

Arrayed the burning stars' magnificence,

The living bodies of beasts and the brain of man.

What stark Necessity or ordered Chance

Became alive to know the cosmic whole?

What magic of numbers, what mechanic dance

Developed consciousness, assumed a soul?

The darkness was the Omnipotent's abode,

Hood of omniscience, a blind mask of God.

Life-Unity

I housed within my heart the life of things,
All hearts athrob in the world I felt as mine;
I shared the joy that in creation sings
And drank its sorrow like a poignant wine.

I have felt the anger in another's breast,
All passions poured through my world-self their waves;
One love I shared in a million bosoms expressed.
I am the beast man slays, the beast he saves.

I spread life's burning wings of rapture and pain;
Black fire and gold fire strove towards one bliss:
I rose by them towards a supernal plane
Of power and love and deathless ecstasies.

A deep spiritual calm no touch can sway
Upholds the mystery of this Passion-play.

The Golden Light

Thy golden Light came down into my brain
And the grey rooms of mind sun-touched became
A bright reply to Wisdom's occult plane,
A calm illumination and a flame.

Thy golden Light came down into my throat,
And all my speech is now a tune divine,
A paean song of Thee my single note;
My words are drunk with the Immortal's wine.

Thy golden Light came down into my heart
Smiting my life with Thy eternity;
Now has it grown a temple where Thou art
And all its passions point towards only Thee.

Thy golden Light came down into my feet;
My earth is now Thy playfield and Thy seat.

The Infinite Adventure

On the waters of a nameless Infinite
 My skiff is launched; I have left the human shore.
 All fades behind me and I see before
The unknown abyss and one pale pointing light.
An unseen Hand controls my rudder. Night
 Walls up the sea in a black corridor, —
 An unconscious Hunger's lion plaint and roar
Or the ocean sleep of a dead Eremite.

I feel the greatness of the Power I seek
 Surround me; below me are its giant deeps,
 Beyond, the invisible height no soul has trod.
I shall be merged in the Lonely and Unique
 And wake into a sudden blaze of God,
 The marvel and rapture of the Apocalypse.

The Greater Plan

I am held no more by life's alluring cry,
 Her joy and grief, her charm, her laughter's lute.
 Hushed are the magic moments of the flute,
And form and colour and brief ecstasy.
I would hear, in my spirit's wideness solitary,
 The Voice that speaks when mortal lips are mute:
 I seek the wonder of things absolute
Born from the silence of Eternity.

There is a need within the soul of man
 The splendours of the surface never sate;
 For life and mind and their glory and debate
Are the slow prelude of a vaster theme,
 A sketch confused of a supernal plan,
 A preface to the epic of the Supreme.

The Universal Incarnation

There is a wisdom like a brooding Sun,
 A Bliss in the heart's crypt grown fiery white,
The heart of a world in which all hearts are one,
 A Silence on the mountains of delight,

A Calm that cradles Fate upon its knees;
 A wide Compassion leans to embrace earth's pain;
A Witness dwells within our secrecies,
 The incarnate Godhead in the body of man.

Our mind is a glimmering curtain of that Ray,
 Our strength a parody of the Immortal's power,
Our joy a dreamer on the Eternal's way
 Hunting the unseizable beauty of an hour.

Only on the heart's veiled door the word of flame
Is written, the secret and tremendous Name.

The Godhead

I sat behind the dance of Danger's hooves
In the shouting street that seemed a futurist's whim,
And suddenly felt, exceeding Nature's grooves,
In me, enveloping me the body of Him.

Above my head a mighty head was seen,
A face with the calm of immortality
And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene
In the vast circle of its sovereignty.

His hair was mingled with the sun and breeze;
The world was in His heart and He was I:
I housed in me the Everlasting's peace,
The strength of One whose substance cannot die.

The moment passed and all was as before;
Only that deathless memory I bore.

The Stone Goddess

In a town of gods, housed in a little shrine,
 From sculptured limbs the Godhead looked at me, —
A living Presence deathless and divine,
 A Form that harboured all infinity.

The great World-Mother and her mighty will
 Inhabited the earth's abysmal sleep,
Voiceless, omnipotent, inscrutable,
 Mute in the desert and the sky and deep.

Now veiled with mind she dwells and speaks no word,
 Voiceless, inscrutable, omniscient,
Hiding until our soul has seen, has heard
 The secret of her strange embodiment,

One in the worshipper and the immobile shape,
A beauty and mystery flesh or stone can drape.

The Cosmic Dance

(Dance of Krishna, Dance of Kali)

Two measures are there of the cosmic dance.

Always we hear the tread of Kali's feet
Measuring in rhythms of pain and grief and chance
Life's game of hazard terrible and sweet.

The ordeal of the veiled Initiate,
The hero soul at play with Death's embrace,
Wrestler in the dread gymnasium of Fate
And sacrifice a lonely path to Grace,

Man's sorrows made a key to the Mysteries,
Truth's narrow road out of Time's wastes of dream,
The soul's seven doors from Matter's tomb to rise,
Are the common motives of her tragic theme.

But when shall Krishna's dance through Nature move,
His mask of sweetness, laughter, rapture, love?

Krishna

At last I find a meaning of soul's birth
 Into this universe terrible and sweet,
I who have felt the hungry heart of earth
 Aspiring beyond heaven to Krishna's feet.

I have seen the beauty of immortal eyes,
 And heard the passion of the Lover's flute,
And known a deathless ecstasy's surprise
 And sorrow in my heart for ever mute.

Nearer and nearer now the music draws,
 Life shudders with a strange felicity;
All Nature is a wide enamoured pause
 Hoping her lord to touch, to clasp, to be.

For this one moment lived the ages past;
The world now throbs fulfilled in me at last.

Shiva

On the white summit of eternity
 A single Soul of bare infinities,
 Guarded he keeps by a fire-screen of peace
His mystic loneliness of nude ecstasy.
But, touched by an immense delight to be,
 He looks across unending depths and sees
 Musing amid the inconscient silences
The Mighty Mother's dumb felicity.

Half now awake she rises to his glance;
 Then, moved to circling by her heart-beats' will,
 The rhythmic worlds describe that passion-dance.
Life springs in her and Mind is born; her face
 She lifts to Him who is Herself, until
 The Spirit leaps into the Spirit's embrace.

Man the Enigma

A deep enigma is the soul of man.

His conscious life obeys the Inconscient's rule,

His need of joy is learned in sorrow's school,

His heart is a chaos and an empyrean.

His subtle Ignorance borrows Wisdom's plan;

His mind is the Infinite's sharp and narrow tool.

He wades through mud to reach the Wonderful,

And does what Matter must or Spirit can.

All powers in his living's soil take root

And claim from him their place and struggling right:

His ignorant creature mind crawling towards light

Is Nature's fool and Godhead's candidate,

A demigod and a demon and a brute,

The slave and the creator of his fate.

The Word of the Silence

A bare impersonal hush is now my mind,
 A world of sight clear and inimitable,
A volume of silence by a Godhead signed,
 A greatness pure of thought, virgin of will.

Once on its pages Ignorance could write
 In a scribble of intellect the blind guess of Time
And cast gleam-messages of ephemeral light,
 A food for souls that wander on Nature's rim.

But now I listen to a greater Word
 Born from the mute unseen omniscient Ray:
The Voice that only Silence' ear has heard
 Leaps missioned from an eternal glory of Day.

All turns from a wideness and unbroken peace
To a tumult of joy in a sea of wide release.

The Self's Infinity

I have become what before Time I was.

A secret touch has quieted thought and sense:
All things by the agent Mind created pass
Into a void and mute magnificence.

My life is a silence grasped by timeless hands;
The world is drowned in an immortal gaze.
Naked my spirit from its vestures stands;
I am alone with my own self for space.

My heart is a centre of infinity,
My body a dot in the soul's vast expanse.
All being's huge abyss wakes under me,
Once screened in a gigantic Ignorance.

A momentless immensity pure and bare,
I stretch to an eternal everywhere.

The Dual Being

There are two beings in my single self.

A Godhead watches Nature from behind
At play in front with a brilliant surface elf,
A time-born creature with a human mind.

Tranquil and boundless like a sea or sky,
The Godhead knows himself Eternity's son.
Radiant his mind and vast, his heart as free;
His will is a sceptre of dominion.

The smaller self by Nature's passions driven,
Thoughtful and erring learns his human task;
All must be known and to that Greatness given
His mind and life, the mirror and the mask.

As with the figure of a symbol dance
The screened Omniscient plays at Ignorance.

Lila

In us is the thousandfold Spirit who is one,
 An eternal thinker calm and great and wise,
A seer whose eye is an all-regarding sun,
 A poet of the cosmic mysteries.

A critic Witness pieces everything
 And binds the fragments in his brilliant sheaf;
A World-adventurer borne on Destiny's wing
 Gambles with death and triumph, joy and grief.

A king of greatness and a slave of love,
 Host of the stars and guest in Nature's inn,
A high spectator spirit throned above,
 A pawn of passion in the game divine,

One who has made in sport the suns and seas
Mirrors in our being his immense caprice.

Surrender

O Thou of whom I am the instrument,
O secret Spirit and Nature housed in me,
Let all my mortal being now be blent
In Thy still glory of divinity.

I have given my mind to be dug Thy channel mind,
I have offered up my will to be Thy will:
Let nothing of myself be left behind
In our union mystic and unutterable.

My heart shall throb with the world-beats of Thy love,
My body become Thy engine for earth-use;
In my nerves and veins Thy rapture's streams shall move;
My thoughts shall be hounds of Light for Thy power to loose.

Keep only my soul to adore eternally
And meet Thee in each form and soul of Thee.

The Divine Worker

I face earth's happenings with an equal soul;
In all are heard Thy steps: Thy unseen feet
Tread Destiny's pathways in my front. Life's whole
Tremendous theorem is Thou complete.

No danger can perturb my spirit's calm:
My acts are Thine; I do Thy works and pass;
Failure is cradled on Thy deathless arm,
Victory is Thy passage mirrored in Fortune's glass.

In this rude combat with the fate of man
Thy smile within my heart makes all my strength;
Thy Force in me labours at its grandiose plan,
Indifferent to the Time-snake's crawling length.

No power can slay my soul; it lives in Thee.
Thy presence is my immortality.

The Guest

I have discovered my deep deathless being:

Masked by my front of mind, immense, serene
It meets the world with an Immortal's seeing,
A god-spectator of the human scene.

No pain and sorrow of the heart and flesh

Can tread that pure and voiceless sanctuary.
Danger and fear, Fate's hounds, slipping their leash
Rend body and nerve, — the timeless Spirit is free.

Awake, God's ray and witness in my breast,

In the undying substance of my soul
Flamelike, inscrutable the almighty Guest.

Death nearer comes and Destiny takes her toll;

He hears the blows that shatter Nature's house:

Calm sits he, formidable, luminous.

The Inner Sovereign

Now more and more the Epiphany within
 Affirms on Nature's soil His sovereign rights.
My mind has left its prison-camp of brain;
 It pours, a luminous sea from spirit heights.

A tranquil splendour, waits my Force of Life
 Couched in my heart, to do what He shall bid,
Poising wide wings like a great hippogriff
 On which the gods of the empyrean ride.

My senses change into gold gates of bliss;
 An ecstasy thrills through touch and sound and sight
Flooding the blind material sheath's dull ease:
 My darkness answers to His call of light.

Nature in me one day like Him shall sit
Victorious, calm, immortal, infinite.

Creation

Since Thou hadst all eternity to amuse,

 O sculptor of the living shapes of earth,

 O dramatist of death and life and birth,

World-artist revelling in forms and hues,

Hast Thou shaped the marvel of the whirling spheres,

 A scientist passing Nature through his tubes,

 And played with numbers, measures, theorems, cubes,

O mathematician Mind that never errs,

Building a universe from Thy theories?

 Protean is Thy spirit of delight,

 Craftsman minute and architect of might,

World-adept of a thousand mysteries.

Or forged some deep Necessity, not Thy whim,

Fate and Inconscience and the net of Time?

A Dream of Surreal Science

One dreamed and saw a gland write Hamlet, drink
At the Mermaid, capture immortality;
A committee of hormones on the Aegean's brink
Composed the Iliad and the Odyssey.

A thyroid, meditating almost nude
Under the Bo-tree, saw the eternal Light
And, rising from its mighty solitude,
Spoke of the Wheel and eightfold Path all right.

A brain by a disordered stomach driven
Thundered through Europe, conquered, ruled and fell,
From St Helena went, perhaps, to Heaven.
Thus wagged on the surreal world, until

A scientist played with atoms and blew out
The universe before God had time to shout.

In The Battle

Often, in the slow ages' wide retreat

On Life's long bridge through Time's enormous sea,
I have accepted death and borne defeat

If by my fall some gain were clutched for Thee.

To this world's inconscient Power Thou hast given the right

To oppose the shining passage of my soul:
She levies on each step the tax of Night.

Doom, her unjust accountant, keeps the roll.

Around my way the Titan forces press;

This earth is theirs, they hold the days in fee,
I am full of wounds and the fight merciless:

Is it not yet Thy hour of victory?

Even as Thou wilt! What still to Fate Thou owest,

O Ancient of the worlds, Thou knowest, Thou knowest.

The Little Ego

This puppet ego the World-Mother made,
 This little profiteer of Nature's works,
Her trust in his life-tenancy betrayed,
 Makes claim on claim, all debt to her he shirks.

Each movement of our life our ego fills;
 Inwoven in each thread of being's weft,
When most we vaunt our selflessness, it steals
 A sordid part; no corner void is left.

One way lies free, our heart and soul to give,
 Our body and mind to Thee and every cell,
And steeped in Thy world-infinity to live.
 Then lost in light, shall fade the ignoble spell.

Nature, of her rebellion quit, shall be
A breath of the spirit's vast serenity.

The Miracle of Birth

I saw my soul a traveller through Time;
 From life to life the cosmic ways it trod,
Obscure in the depths and on the heights sublime,
 Evolving from the worm into the god.

A spark of the eternal Fire, it came
 To build a house in Matter for the Unborn.
The inconscient sunless Night received the flame,
 In the brute seed of things dumb and forlorn

Life stirred and Thought outlined a gleaming shape
 Till on the stark inanimate earth could move,
Born to somnambulist Nature in her sleep,
 A thinking creature who can hope and love.

Still by slow steps the miracle goes on,
The Immortal's gradual birth mid mire and stone.

The Bliss of Brahman

I am swallowed in a foam-white sea of bliss,

I am a curving wave of God's delight,

A shapeless flow of happy passionate light,

A whirlpool of the streams of Paradise.

I am a cup of His felicities,

A thunderblast of His golden ecstasy's might,

A fire of joy upon creation's height;

I am His rapture's wonderful abyss.

I am drunken with the glory of the Lord,

I am vanquished by the beauty of the Unborn;

I have looked alive on the Eternal's face.

My mind is cloven by His radiant sword,

My heart by His beatific touch is torn,

My life is a meteor-dust of His flaming Grace.

Moments

If perfect moments on the peak of things,
 These tops of knowledge, greatness, ecstasy,
 Are only moments, this too enough might be.
I have put on the rapid flaming wings
Of souls whom the Ignorance black-robed Nature brings
 And the frail littleness of mortality
 Can bind not always. A high sovereignty
Makes them awhile creation's radiant kings.

These momentary upliftings of the soul
 Prepare the spirit's glorious permanence.
 The peace of God, a mighty transience,
Is now my spirit's boundless atmosphere.
 All parts are gathered into a timeless whole;
 All moments blaze in an eternal year.

The Body

This body which was once my universe,
Is now a pittance carried by the soul, —
Its Titan's motion bears this scanty purse,
Pacing through vastness to a vaster goal.

Too small was it to meet the giant need
That only infinitude can satisfy:
He keeps it still, for in the folds is hid
His secret passport to eternity.

In his front an endless Time and Space deploy
The landscape of their golden happenings;
His heart is filled with sweet and violent joy,
His mind is upon great and distant things.

How grown with all the world conterminous
Is the little dweller in this narrow house!

Liberation [2]

My mind, my soul grow larger than all Space;
Time founders in that vastness glad and nude:
The body fades, an outline, a dim trace,
A memory in the spirit's solitude.

This universe is a vanishing circumstance
In the glory of a white infinity
Beautiful and bare for the Immortal's dance,
House-room of my immense felicity.

In the thrilled happy giant void within
Thought lost in light and passion drowned in bliss,
Changing into a stillness hyaline,
Obey the edict of the Eternal's peace.

Life's now the Ineffable's dominion;
Nature is ended and the spirit alone.

Light

Light, endless Light! darkness has room no more,
Life's ignorant gulfs give up their secrecy:
The huge inconscient depths unplumbed before
Lie glimmering in vast expectancy.

Light, timeless Light immutable and apart!
The holy sealed mysterious doors unclose.
Light, burning Light from the Infinite's diamond heart
Quivers in my heart where blooms the deathless rose.

Light in its rapture leaping through the nerves!
Light, brooding Light! each smitten passionate cell
In a mute blaze of ecstasy preserves
A living sense of the Imperishable.

I move in an ocean of stupendous Light
Joining my depths to His eternal height.

The Unseen Infinite

Arisen to voiceless unattainable peaks
I meet no end, for all is boundless He,
An absolute joy the wide-winged spirit seeks,
A Might, a Presence, an Eternity.

In the inconscient dreadful dumb Abyss
Are heard the heart-beats of the Infinite.
The insensible midnight veils His trance of bliss,
A fathomless sealed astonishment of Light.

In His ray that dazzles our vision everywhere,
Our half-closed eyes seek fragments of the One:
Only the eyes of Immortality dare
To look unblinded on that living Sun.

Yet are our souls the Immortal's selves within,
Comrades and powers and children of the Unseen.

“I”

This strutting “I” of human self and pride
Is a puppet built by Nature for her use,
And dances as her strong compulsions bid,
Forcefully feeble, brilliantly obtuse.

Our thinking is her leap of fluttering mind,
We hear and see by her constructed sense:
Our force is hers; her colours have combined
Our fly-upon-the-wheel magnificence.

He sits within who turns on her machine
These beings, portions of his mystery,
Many dwarf beams of his great calm sunshine,
A reflex of his sole infinity.

One mighty Self of cosmic act and thought
Employs this figure of a unit nought.

The Cosmic Spirit

I am a single Self all Nature fills.

Immeasurable, unmoved the Witness sits:
He is the silence brooding on her hills,
The circling motion of her cosmic might.

I have broken the limits of embodied mind
And am no more the figure of a soul.
The burning galaxies are in me outlined;
The universe is my stupendous whole.

My life is the life of village and continent,
I am earth's agony and her throbs of bliss;
I share all creatures' sorrow and content
And feel the passage of every stab and kiss.

Impassive, I bear each act and thought and mood:
Time traverses my hushed infinitude.

Self

He said, "I am egoless, spiritual, free,"
Then swore because his dinner was not ready.
I asked him why. He said, "It is not me,
But the belly's hungry god who gets unsteady."

I asked him why. He said, "It is his play.
I am unmoved within, desireless, pure.
I care not what may happen day by day."
I questioned him, "Are you so very sure?"

He answered, "I can understand your doubt.
But to be free is all. It does not matter
How you may kick and howl and rage and shout,
Making a row over your daily platter.

"To be aware of self is liberty.
Self I have got and, having self, am free."

Omnipresence

He is in me, round me, facing everywhere.

Self-walled in ego to exclude His right,
I stand upon its boundaries and stare
Into the frontiers of the Infinite.

Each finite thing I see is a façade;
From its windows looks at me the Illimitable.
In vain was my prison of separate body made;
His occult presence burns in every cell.

He has become my substance and my breath;
He is my anguish and my ecstasy.
My birth is His eternity's sign, my death
A passage of His immortality.

My dumb abysses are His screened abode;
In my heart's chamber lives the unworshipped God.

The Inconscient Foundation

My soul regards its veiled subconscious base;
 All the dead obstinate symbols of the past,
The hereditary moulds, the stamps of race
 Are upheld to sight, the old imprints effaced.

In a downpour of supernal light it reads
 The black Inconscient's enigmatic script —
Recorded in a hundred shadowy screeds
 An inert world's obscure enormous drift;

All flames, is torn and burned and cast away.
 Here slept the tables of the Ignorance,
There the dumb dragon edicts of her sway,
 The scriptures of Necessity and Chance.

Pure is the huge foundation now and nude,
A boundless mirror of God's infinitude.

Adwaita

I walked on the high-wayed Seat of Solomon
Where Shankaracharya's tiny temple stands
Facing Infinity from Time's edge, alone
On the bare ridge ending earth's vain romance.

Around me was a formless solitude:
All had become one strange Unnameable,
An unborn sole Reality world-nude,
Topless and fathomless, for ever still.

A Silence that was Being's only word,
The unknown beginning and the voiceless end
Abolishing all things moment-seen or heard,
On an incommunicable summit reigned,

A lonely Calm and void unchanging Peace
On the dumb crest of Nature's mysteries.

The Hill-Top Temple

After unnumbered steps of a hill-stair
 I saw upon earth's head brilliant with sun
 The immobile Goddess in her house of stone
In a loneliness of meditating air.
Wise were the human hands that set her there
 Above the world and Time's dominion;
 The Soul of all that lives, calm, pure, alone,
Revealed its boundless self mystic and bare.

Our body is an epitome of some Vast
 That masks its presence by our humanness.
 In us the secret Spirit can indite
A page and summary of the Infinite,
 A nodus of Eternity expressed
 Live in an image and a sculptured face.

The Divine Hearing

All sounds, all voices have become Thy voice,
 Music and thunder and the cry of birds,
Life's babble of her sorrows and her joys,
 Cadence of human speech and murmured words,

The laughter of the sea's enormous mirth,
 The winged plane purring through the conquered air,
The auto's trumpet-song of speed to earth,
 The machine's reluctant drone, the siren's blare

Blowing upon the windy horn of Space
 A call of distance and of mystery,
Memories of sun-bright lands and ocean ways, —
 All now are wonder-tones and themes of Thee.

A secret harmony steals through the blind heart
And all grows beautiful because Thou art.

Because Thou Art

Because Thou art All-beauty and All-bliss,
My soul blind and enamoured yearns for Thee;
It bears Thy mystic touch in all that is
And thrills with the burden of that ecstasy.

Behind all eyes I meet Thy secret gaze
And in each voice I hear Thy magic tune:
Thy sweetness hunts my heart through Nature's ways;
Nowhere it beats now from Thy snare immune.

It loves Thy body in all living things;
Thy joy is there in every leaf and stone:
The moments bring Thee on their fiery wings;
Sight's endless artistry is Thou alone.

Time voyages with Thee upon its prow, —
And all the future's passionate hope is Thou.

Divine Sight

Each sight is now immortal with Thy bliss:

My soul through the rapt eyes has come to see;
A veil is rent and they no more can miss
The miracle of Thy world-epiphany.

Into an ecstasy of vision caught

Each natural object is of Thee a part,
A rapture-symbol from Thy substance wrought,
A poem shaped in Beauty's living heart,

A master-work of colour and design,

A mighty sweetness borne on grandeur's wings;
A burdened wonder of significant line
Reveals itself in even commonest things.

All forms are Thy dream-dialect of delight,
O Absolute, O vivid Infinite.

Divine Sense

Surely I take no more an earthly food
But eat the fruits and plants of Paradise!
For Thou hast changed my sense's habitude
From mortal pleasure to divine surprise.

Hearing and sight are now an ecstasy,
And all the fragrances of earth disclose
A sweetness matching in intensity
Odour of the crimson marvel of the rose.

In every contact's deep invading thrill,
That lasts as if its source were infinite,
I feel Thy touch; Thy bliss imperishable
Is crowded into that moment of delight.

The body burns with Thy rapture's sacred fire,
Pure, passionate, holy, virgin of desire.

The Iron Dictators

I looked for Thee alone, but met my glance
 The iron dreadful Four who rule our breath,
Masters of falsehood, Kings of ignorance,
 High sovereign Lords of suffering and death.

Whence came these formidable autarchies,
 From what inconscient blind Infinity, —
Cold propagandists of a million lies,
 Dictators of a world of agony?

Or was it Thou who bor'st the fourfold mask?
 Enveloping Thy timeless heart in Time,
Thou hast bound the spirit to its cosmic task,
 To find Thee veiled in this tremendous mime.

Thou, only Thou, canst raise the invincible siege,
O Light, O deathless Joy, O rapturous Peace!

Form

O worshipper of the formless Infinite,
 Reject not form, what dwells in it is He.
 Each finite is that deep Infinity
Enshrining His veiled soul of pure delight.
Form in its heart of silence recondite
 Hides the significance of His mystery,
 Form is the wonder-house of eternity,
A cavern of the deathless Eremite.

There is a beauty in the depths of God,
 There is a miracle of the Marvellous
 That builds the universe for its abode.
Bursting into shape and colour like a rose,
 The One, in His glory multitudinous,
 Compels the great world-petals to uncloze.

Immortality

I have drunk deep of God's own liberty
 From which an occult sovereignty derives:
 Hidden in an earthly garment that survives,
I am the worldless being vast and free.
A moment stamped with that supremacy
 Has rescued me from cosmic hooks and gyves;
 Abolishing death and time my nature lives
In the deep heart of immortality.

God's contract signed with Ignorance is torn;
 Time has become the Eternal's endless year,
 My soul's wide self of living infinite Space
Outlines its body luminous and unborn
 Behind the earth-robe; under the earth-mask grows clear
 The mould of an imperishable face.

Man, the Despot of Contraries

I am greater than the greatness of the seas,
A swift tornado of God-energy:
A helpless flower that quivers in the breeze,
I am weaker than the reed one breaks with ease.

I harbour all the wisdom of the wise
In my nature of stupendous Ignorance;
On a flame of righteousness I fix my eyes
While I wallow in sweet sin and join hell's dance.

My mind is brilliant like a full-orbed moon,
Its darkness is the caverned troglodyte's.
I gather long Time's wealth and squander soon;
I am an epitome of opposites.

I with repeated life death's sleep surprise;
I am a transience of the eternities.

The One Self

All are deceived, do what the One Power dictates,
 Yet each thinks his own will his nature moves;
The hater knows not 'tis himself he hates,
 The lover knows not 'tis himself he loves.

In all is one being many bodies bear;
 Here Krishna flutes upon the forest road,
Here Shiva sits ash-smeared, with matted hair.
 But Shiva and Krishna are the single God.

In us too Krishna seeks for love and joy,
 In us too Shiva struggles with the world's grief.
One Self in all of us endures annoy,
 Cries in his pain and asks his fate's relief.

My rival's downfall is my own disgrace:
I look on my enemy and see Krishna's face.

The Inner Fields

There is a brighter ether than this blue
 Pretence of an enveloping heavenly vault,
 A deeper greenness than this laughing assault
Of emerald rapture pearled with tears of dew.
Immortal spaces of caerulean hue
 Are in our reach and fields without this fault
 Of drab brown earth and streams that never halt
In their deep murmur which white flowers strew

Floating like stars upon a strip of sky.
 This world behind is made of truer stuff
Than the manufactured tissue of earth's grace.
There we can walk and see the gods go by
 And sip from Hebe's cup nectar enough
 To make for us heavenly limbs and deathless face.

APPENDIX

Early Sonnets

To the Cuckoo

Sounds of the wakening world, the year's increase,
Passage of wind and all his dewy powers
With breath and laughter of new-bathèd flowers
And that deep light of heaven above the trees
Awake mid leaves that muse in golden peace
Sweet noise of birds, but most in heavenly showers
The cuckoo's voice pervades the lucid hours,
Is priest and summoner of these melodies.
The spent and weary streams refresh their youth
At that creative rain and barren groves
Regain their face of flowers; in thee the ruth
Of Nature wakening her dead children moves.
But chiefly to renew thou hast the art
Fresh childhood in the obscurèd human heart.

O Face that I have Loved

O face that I have loved until no face
Beneath the quiet heavens such glory wear,
They say you are not beautiful, — no snare
Of twilight in the changing mysticness
Or deep enhaloed secrecy of hair,
Soft largeness in the eyes I dare not kiss!
Unreal all your bosom's dreadful bliss.
Too narrow are your brows they say to bear
The temple of vast beauty in its span
Or chaste cold bosom to house fierily
Beauty that maddens all the heart of man.
I know not; this I know that utterly
My soul is by some magic curls surprised,
Some glances have my heart immortalized.

I Cannot Equal

I cannot equal those most absolute eyes,
Although they rule my being, with the stars,
Nor floral rich comparisons devise
To detail sweetness that your body wears.
Nor in the heavens hints of you I find,
Nor dim suggestions in this thoughtful eve;
The moonlight of your darker grace is blind.
Who can with such pale delicacies deceive
A naked burning heart? Only one place
Satisfies me of you, where the feet
That I shall never clasp, with beauty press
The barren earth in one place only sweet,
One face in the wide world alone divine,
The only one that never can be mine.

O Letter Dull and Cold

O letter dull and cold, how can she read
Gladly these lifeless lines, no fire that prove,
When others even their passionate hearts exceed
Caressing her sweet name with words of love?
O me that I could force this barrier, turn
My heart to syllables, make all desire
One burning word, then would my letters yearn
With some reflection of that hidden fire.
Ah if I could, what then? This fiery pit
Within for human eyes was never meant.
All hearts would view with horror or with hate
A picture not of earthly lineament.
Yourself even, sweet, would start with terror back
As at the hissing of a sudden snake.

My Life is wasted

My life is wasted like a lamp ablaze
Within a solitary house unused,
My life is wasted and by Love men praise
For sweet and kind. How often have I mused
What lovely thing were love and much repined
At my cold bosom moved not by that flame.
'Tis kindled; lo, my dreadful being twined
Round one whom to myself I dare not name.
I cannot quench the fire I did not light
And he that lit it will not; I cannot even
Drive out the guest I never did invite;
Although the soul he dwells with loses heaven.
I burn and know not why; I sink to hell
Fruitlessly and am forbidden to rebel.

Because Thy Flame is Spent

Because thy flame is spent, shall mine grow less,
O bud, O wonder of the opening rose?
Why both my soul and Love it would disgrace
If I could trade in love, begin and close
My long account of passion, like a book
Of merchant's credit given to be repaid,
Or not returned, struck off with lowering look
Like a bad debt uncritically made.
What thou couldst give, thou gav'st me, one sweet smile
Worth all the sunlight that the years contain,
One month of months when thy sweet spirit awhile
Fluttered o'er mine half-thinking to remain.
What I could give, I gave thee, to my last breath
Immortal love, immovable by death.

Thou didst Mistake

Thou didst mistake, thy spirit's infant flight
Opening its lovely wings upon the sun
Paused o'er the first strong bloom that met thy sight
Thinking perhaps it was the only one.
But all this fragrant garden was beyond.
Winds came to thee with hints of honey; day
Disclosed a brighter hope than this unsunned
Thought-sheltered heart and called thee far away.
Thou didst mistake. Must I then rage, grow ill,
With tortured vanity and think it love,
Miscall with brutal names my lady's will
Fouling thy snow-white image, O my dove?
Is not thy kiss enough, though only one,
For all eternity to live upon?

Rose, I have Loved

Rose, I have loved thy beauty, as I love
The dress that thou hast worn, the transient grass,
O'er which thy happy careless footsteps move,
The yet-thrilled waysides that have watched thee pass.
Soul, I have loved thy sweetness as men love
The necessary air they crave to breathe,
The sunlight lavished from the skies above,
And firmness of the earth their steps beneath.
But were that beauty all, my love might cease
Like love of weaker spirits; were't thy charm
And grace of soul, mine might with age decrease
Or find in Death a silence and a term,
But rooted in the unnameable in thee
Shall triumph and transcend eternity.

I have a Hundred Lives

I have a hundred lives before me yet
To grasp thee in, O spirit ethereal,
Be sure I will with heart insatiate
Pursue thee like a hunter through them all.
Thou yet shalt turn back on the eternal way
And with awakened vision watch me come
Smiling a little at errors past, and lay
Thy eager hand in mine, its proper home.
Meanwhile made happy by thy happiness
I shall approach thee in things and people dear
And in thy spirit's motions half-possess
Loving what thou hast loved, shall feel thee near,
Until I lay my hands on thee indeed
Somewhere among the stars, as 'twas decreed.

Still there is Something

Still there is something that I lack in thee
And yet must find. There is a broad abyss
Between possession and true sovereignty
Which thou must bridge with a diviner kiss.
I questioned all the beauty of other girls
Thinking thou hadst it not to give indeed.
But not Giannina's breasts nor Pippa's curls
Contained it; thou alone canst meet my need.
Deniest thou some secret of thy soul
To me who claim thee all? Nay, can it be
Thy bosom's joys escape from my control?
Forbid it Heaven Hell should yawn for thee.
Deny it now! Let not sweet love begun
End in red blood and awful justice done.

I have a Doubt

I have a doubt, I have a doubt which kills.
Tell me, O torturing beauty, O divine
Witchcraft, O soul escaped from heaven's hills
Yet fed upon strange food of utter sin.
Why dost thou torture me? Hast thou no fear?
My love was ever like my hate a sword
To search the heart and kill however dear
The joy that would not own me for its lord.
Yet must I still believe that thou art true
If thou wilt say it and smile. Knowst thou not then
I have purchased with my passion all of you
And wilt thou keep one nook for other men?
Deny it now! Let not sweet love begun
End in red blood and awful justice done.

To weep because a Glorious Sun

To weep because a glorious sun has set
Which the next morn shall gild the east again,
To mourn that mighty strengths must yield to fate
Which by that fall a double force attain,
To shrink from pain without whose friendly strife
Joy could not be, to make a terror of death
Who smiling beckons us to farther life
And is a bridge for the persistent breath;
Despair and anguish and the tragic grief
Of dry set eyes or such disastrous tears
As rend the heart though meant for its relief
And all man's ghastly company of fears
Are born of folly that believes this span
Of brittle life can limit immortal man.

What is this Talk

What is this talk of slayer and of slain?
Swords are not sharp to slay nor floods assuage
This flaming soul. Mortality and pain
Are mere conventions of a mightier stage.
As when a hero by his doom pursued
Falls like a pillar of the huge world uptorn
Shaking the hearts of men and awe-imbued,
Silent the audience sits or weeps forlorn,
Meanwhile behind the stage the actor sighs
Deep-lunged relief, puts off what he has been
And talks with friends that waited or from the flies
Watches the quiet of the closing scene,
Even so the unwounded spirits of the slain
Beyond our vision passing live again.

Transiit, Non Periit

(My grandfather, Rajnarayan Bose, died September 1899)

Not in annihilation lost, nor given
To darkness art thou fled from us and light,
O strong and sentient spirit; no mere heaven
Of ancient joys, no silence eremite
Received thee; but the omnipresent Thought
Of which thou wast a part and earthly hour,
Took back its gift. Into that splendour caught
Thou hast not lost thy special brightness. Power
Remains with thee and the old genial force
Unseen for blinding light, not darkly lurks:
As when a sacred river in its course
Dives into ocean, there its strength abides
Not less because with vastness wed and works
Unnoticed in the grandeur of the tides.

Note on the Texts

This book contains all of Sri Aurobindo's sonnets. The seventy-four sonnets that he wrote during the 1930s and 1940s have been placed before the fourteen sonnets that he wrote from around 1898 to 1909. The sonnets of both groups have been arranged chronologically by date of composition. If this date is not known, other factors, such as date of publication, location of manuscript and style of handwriting, have been evaluated in order to determine chronological position.

It is important for the reader to bear in mind that not all of the sonnets were given the same amount of attention by Sri Aurobindo. Eight were published during his lifetime, and so were seen by him through the draft, fair copy, typed copy and proof stages. One or two were forgotten or abandoned by Sri Aurobindo without a fair handwritten or typed copy ever having been made. In order to give the reader some idea of the amount of work Sri Aurobindo put into each sonnet, the editors list the total number of extant manuscript versions of each. Early drafts of some sonnets may be missing. Many first and second drafts were not titled. The titles of early drafts that differ from the final titles have been given. The spacing and indentation of the later sonnets have been standardised according to the patterns for Shakespearean and Petrarchan

sonnets adopted by Sri Aurobindo in his final handwritten and typed versions for each type.

The first three sonnets were published in *The Calcutta Review* in October 1934.

1. Transformation. Circa 1933. In August 1934, Sri Aurobindo asked his secretary to type drafts of this poem, “The Other Earths” and two others (“The World Game” and “Symbol Moon”) from the notebook in which they had been written. In October 1934 “Transformation”, “The Other Earths” and “Nirvana” were published in the *Calcutta Review*. The same month, Sri Aurobindo informed a disciple that the first two were “already some years old”, but it is unlikely that they were more than a year old at that time. The first draft of “Transformation” occurs in a notebook just after the first draft of the poem “Trance”, which is dated 16 October 1933; this makes it probable that “Transformation” belongs to the same year. In a note written after “Transformation” and the next two sonnets were typed for publication, Sri Aurobindo indicated that he preferred the sestet of Petrarchan sonnets to be set as they have been set in the present book, irrespective of rhyme pattern.

2. The Other Earths. Circa 1933. The first draft of this poem occurs just after the first draft of “Transformation”; it thus belongs in all likelihood to the year 1933. See the note

to “Transformation” for more details. Early drafts of this sonnet were entitled “The Hidden Earths” and “Visions”.

3. Nirvana. August 1934. This sonnet was written while the texts of “Transformation” and “The Other Earths” were being prepared for publication in *The Calcutta Review*. It was published along with them in that journal in October 1934.

Sonnets 4 to 11 are undated. Their first drafts seem to have been written in 1934. Typed copies of seven of the poems (the eighth being a variant of one of the seven) were typed sometime (probably not very long) before December 1934. Five were revised subsequently.

4. Man the Thinking Animal. Circa 1934. A total of six handwritten drafts, the earliest contemporaneous with close-to-final drafts of “Transformation” and “The Other Earths”.

5. Contrasts. Circa 1934. A total of six handwritten drafts, the earliest contemporaneous with close-to-final drafts of “Transformation” and “The Other Earths”.

6. The Silver Call. Circa 1934 – 44. A total of seven handwritten drafts, the first written shortly after those of the two preceding sonnets. The original poem went

through several versions, eventually becoming two, “The Silver Call” and “Call of the Impossible”. The final version of “The Silver Call” is dated “193 – (?)/23.3.44”.

7. Evolution [1]. Circa 1934 – 44. Six manuscripts spread over many years; the last is dated “193 – (?)/22.3.44”. This poem and the one above were often worked on together, as were the two that follow.

8. The Call of the Impossible. 1934 and after. Five manuscripts. This poem began as a variant of “The Silver Call”: the first lines of the two poems were once identical — “There is a godhead in unrealized things” — and the first rhyming words remain same even in the final versions.

9. Evolution [2]. Circa 1934. Two handwritten and one typed manuscript. The handwritten drafts were written around the same time as early drafts of “The Call of the Impossible”; the final typed version of the two poems are also contemporaneous. The present sonnet has the same title as the one which forms a pair with “A Silver Call” (see “Evolution [1]” above). There is no textual relation between it and its namesake, but there is some between it and “The Silver Call”: its closing couplet was first used as the close of “The Silver Call” and its second and fourth lines are similar to the tenth and twelfth lines of “The Silver Call”.

10. Man the Mediator. Circa 1934. Five manuscripts.

11. The Infinitesimal Infinite. Circa 1934. This sonnet and two others were published in *Sri Aurobindo Circle*, Bombay, in 1948. Three handwritten and four typed drafts of this sonnet precede the *Circle* publication.

Sonnets 12 to 15 are undated. Drafts of them seem to have been written shortly after drafts of Sonnets 4 to 11 and before drafts of Sri Aurobindo's poems "Musa Spiritus" and "A God's Labour", which are dated 31 July 1935. Hence these four sonnets probably were written in 1934 or early in 1935. None of the four was typed at that time, however, nor did Sri Aurobindo ever make a fair copy of any of them.

12. Discoveries of Science. Circa 1934 – 35. Three handwritten drafts; no fair copies.

13. The Ways of the Spirit [1]. Circa 1934 – 35. There are a total of six handwritten drafts of this poem. The last two descend independently from the fourth draft, and differ considerably from one another. They have therefore been reproduced as two separate poems. The title for both is taken from the fourth draft.

14. The Ways of the Spirit [2]. See the note to the above sonnet.

15. Science and the Unknowable. Circa 1934 – 35. Three handwritten drafts; no fair copies.

Sonnets 16 to 20 were written in 1936 and 1938.

16. The Yogi and the Whirlpool. 1936. Two handwritten manuscripts, neither of them dated, but certainly written just before “The Kingdom Within”.

17. The Kingdom Within. 14 March 1936. Two handwritten manuscripts.

18. Now I have borne. 2 February 1938. Two handwritten manuscripts.

19. Electron. 15 July 1938. Two handwritten manuscripts.

20. The Indwelling Universal. 15 July 1938. Two handwritten manuscripts.

Sonnets 21 to 29 form a series written in July and August 1938 and revised in March 1944.

21. Bliss of Identity. 25 July 1938, revised 21 March 1944. Two handwritten manuscripts, the first entitled “Identity”.

22. The Witness Spirit. 26 July 1938, revised 21 March 1944. Two handwritten manuscripts.

23. The Hidden Plan. 26 July 1938, revised 18 and 21 March 1944. Two manuscripts.

24. The Pilgrim of the Night. 26 July 1938, revised 18 March 1944. Three manuscripts (one partial), the first entitled “In the Night”.

25. Cosmic Consciousness. 26 July 1938, revised apparently on 21 March 1944. Two handwritten manuscripts, the first entitled “The Cosmic Man”.

26. Liberation [1]. 27 July 1938, revised 21 March 1944. Two manuscripts.

27. The Inconscient. 27 July 1938, revised 21 March 1944. Two manuscripts.

28. Life-Unity. 8 August 1938, revised 22 March 1944. Two manuscripts.

29. The Golden Light. 8 August 1938, revised 22 March 1944. Two manuscripts.

Sonnets 30 to 70 were written between 11 September and 16 November 1939 (forty-one sonnets in a little more than two months).

30. The Infinite Adventure. 11 September 1939. Three manuscripts.

31. The Greater Plan. 12 September 1939. Three manuscripts.

32. The Universal Incarnation. 13 September 1939. Four manuscripts.

- 33. The Godhead.** 13 September 1939. Three manuscripts. This sonnet is about an experience Sri Aurobindo had during the first year of his stay in Baroda (1893).
- 34. The Stone Goddess.** 13 September 1939. Four manuscripts. This sonnet is about an experience Sri Aurobindo had at a temple in Karnali, on the banks of the Narmada, near the end of his stay in Baroda (c.1904 – 06.)
- 35. The Cosmic Dance.** 15 September 1939. Published with “The Infinitesimal Infinite” and “Man the Enigma” in *Sri Aurobindo Circle* in 1948. Four handwritten and two typed drafts precede the *Circle* publication.
- 36. Krishna.** 15 September 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 37. Shiva.** 16 September 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 38. Man the Enigma.** 17 September 1939. Published with “The Infinitesimal Infinite” and “The Cosmic Dance” in 1948. Three handwritten and two typed manuscripts precede the *Circle* publication.
- 39. The Word of the Silence.** 18 – 19 September 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 40. The Self’s Infinity.** 18 – 19 September 1939. Three manuscripts, the second one entitled “Self-Infinity”.

- 41. The Dual Being.** 19 September 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 42. Lila.** 20 September 1939. Three manuscripts, the second one entitled “The Thousandfold One”.
- 43. Surrender.** 20 September 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 44. The Divine Worker.** 20 September 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 45. The Guest.** 21 September 1939. Three manuscripts, the first two entitled “The Guest of Nature”.
- 46. The Inner Sovereign.** 22 September 1939, revised 27 September. Three manuscripts, the first two entitled “The Sovereign Tenant”.
- 47. Creation.** 24 September 1939, recast 28 September and subsequently. Three manuscripts, the first two entitled “The Conscious Inconscient”.
- 48. A Dream of Surreal Science.** 25 September 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 49. In the Battle.** 25 September 1939. Two manuscripts.
- 50. The Little Ego.** 26 September 1939. Two manuscripts.

- 51. The Miracle of Birth.** 27 September 1939, revised 29 September and subsequently. Six manuscripts, the second entitled “The Divine Mystery”, the third “The Divine Miracle-Play”, and the fourth and fifth “The Miracle-Play”.
- 52. The Bliss of Brahman.** 29 September 1939, recast 21 October. Five manuscripts; the first has the epigraph: “*He who has found the bliss of the Brahman, has no fear from any quarter/ Upanishad [Taittiriya Upanishad 2.4]]*”.
- 53. Moments.** 29 September 1939, revised 2 October. Four manuscripts.
- 54. The Body.** 2 October 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 55. Liberation [2].** 2 – 3 October 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 56. Light.** 3 – 4 October 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 57. The Unseen Infinite.** 4 October 1939. Three manuscripts, the first one entitled “The Omnipresent”.
- 58. “I”.** 15 October 1939, revised 5 November. Two manuscripts.
- 59. The Cosmic Spirit.** 15 October 1939, revised 5 November. Two manuscripts, the first one entitled “Cosmic Self”.

- 60. Self.** 15 October 1939. Three manuscripts, the first one entitled “Liberty”.
- 61. Omnipresence.** 17 October 1939. Three manuscripts, the first two entitled “The Omnipresent”.
- 62. The Inconscient Foundation.** 18 October 1939, revised 7 February 1940. Two manuscripts.
- 63. Adwaita.** 19 October 1939. Three manuscripts. This poem was written about an experience Sri Aurobindo had while walking on the Takht-i-Sulaiman (“Seat of Solomon”), near Srinagar, in Kashmir, in 1903.
- 64. The Hill-top Temple.** 21 October 1939. Three manuscripts, the first two entitled “The Temple on the Hill-top”. This sonnet is about an experience Sri Aurobindo had at a shrine in the temple-complex on Parvati Hill, near Pune, probably in 1902.
- 65. The Divine Hearing.** 24 October 1939. Three manuscripts, one of which is entitled “Sounds”.
- 66. Because Thou art.** 25 October 1939. Three manuscripts, all untitled.
- 67. Divine Sight.** 26 October 1939. Three manuscripts.
- 68. Divine Sense.** 1 November 1939. Three manuscripts.

69. The Iron Dictators. 14 November 1939 (see the note to the next sonnets). Two manuscripts.

70. Form. 16 November 1939. Three manuscripts. The last manuscripts for this and the previous sonnets are dated 14 November and 16 November 1938. These dates apparently are slips. The manuscripts are numbered by Sri Aurobindo to follow those of poems of October and November 1939. The undated and incomplete first draft of “Form” is in a bound notebook between work on the revised *Life Divine* (begun early in 1939) and a draft of a letter published in September 1940. The second draft of “Form” and the first draft of “The Iron Dictators” are written on the back of a letter dated 12 August 1939.

Sonnets 71 and 72 were written in 1940.

71. Immortality. 8 February 1940. One manuscript.

72. Man, the Despot of Contraries. 29 July 1940. Two manuscripts; the first one, entitled “The Spirit of Man”, seems to have been written shortly after “Man the Thinking Animal” was revised. “Man, the Despot of Contraries” was itself revised in 1944.

Sonnets 73 and 74 were written during the late 1940s.

73. The One Self. 1945 – 47. One manuscript, undated, but in the almost illegible handwriting of the late 1940s.

74. The Inner Fields. 14 March 1947. One handwritten manuscript, legible only with difficulty, and another written by Nirodbaran, Sri Aurobindo's scribe.

Appendix: Early Sonnets

75. To the Cuckoo. This poem was first published in *Songs to Myrtilla and Other Poems* (1898). The handwritten MS has the subtitle "A Spring Morning in India".

Sri Aurobindo wrote fair copies of the twelve sonnets that follow in a notebook that was in use around 1901 – 2. This notebook was confiscated by the Calcutta police when he was arrested in 1908. This made it impossible for him to revise these poems after his release from jail. In the notebook, the first four sonnets are grouped together under the heading "Four Sonnets".

76. O face that I have loved. Circa 1900 – 1901.

77. I cannot equal. Circa 1900 – 1901.

78. O letter dull and cold. Circa 1900 – 1901.

79. My life is wasted. Circa 1900 – 1901.

80. Because thy flame is spent. Circa 1900 – 1901.

81. Thou didst mistake. Circa 1900 – 1901.

82. Rose, I have loved. Circa 1900 – 1901.

83. I have a hundred lives. Circa 1900 – 1901.

84. Still there is something. Circa 1900 – 1901.

85. I have a doubt. Circa 1900 – 1901.

86. To weep because a glorious sun. Circa 1900 – 1901.

87. What is this talk. Circa 1900 – 1901.

88. Transiit, Non Periit. 1909 or earlier. This sonnet to Rajnarayan Bose, Sri Aurobindo's grandfather and a well-known writer and speaker, was first published at the beginning of *Atmacharit*, Rajnarayan's posthumously published memoirs, in 1909. As mentioned in the note printed beneath the title of the sonnet, Rajnarayan died in September 1899. Sri Aurobindo may have written the poem anytime between 1899 and

1909; but since there are no drafts among his Baroda manuscripts, and since the poem belongs stylistically with those of 1909, it seems likely that it was written close to the date of the publication of the book. Quite possibly it was written especially for the book in 1909. The Latin title means: “He has passed on, he has not perished.”

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