

Ode on the Insurrection in Candia

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STR. 1

I LAID my laurel-leaf
At the white feet of grief,
Seeing how with covered face and plumeless wings,
With unreverted head
Veiled, as who mourns his dead,
Lay Freedom couched between the thrones of kings,
A wearied lion without lair,
And bleeding from base wounds, and vexed with alien air.

STR. 2

Who was it, who, put poison to thy mouth,
Who lulled with craft or chant thy vigilant eyes,
O light of all men, lamp to north and south,
Eastward and westward, under all men's skies?
For if thou sleep, we perish, and thy name
Dies with the dying of our ephemeral breath;
And if the dust of death o'ergrows thy flame,
Heaven also is darkened with the dust of death.
If thou be mortal, if thou change or cease,
If thine hand fail, or thine eyes turn from Greece,
Thy firstborn, and the firstfruits of thy fame,
God is no God, and man is moulded out of shame.

STR. 3

Is there change in the secret skies,
In the sacred places that see
The divine beginning of things,
The weft of the web of the world?
Is Freedom a worm that dies,
And God no God of the free?
Is heaven like as earth with her kings
And time as a serpent curled
Round life as a tree?

From the steel-bound snows of the north,
From the mystic mother, the east,
From the sands of the fiery south,
From the low-lit clouds of the west,

A sound of a cry is gone forth;
Arise, stand up from the feast,
Let wine be far from the mouth,
Let no man sleep or take rest,
Till the plague hath ceased.

Let none rejoice or make mirth
Till the evil thing be stayed,
Nor grief be lulled in the lute,
Nor hope be loud on the lyre;
Let none be glad upon earth.
O music of young man and maid,
O songs of the bride, be mute.
For the light of her eyes, her desire,
Is the soul dismayed.

It is not a land new-born
That is scourged of a stranger's hand,
That is rent and consumed with flame.
We have known it of old, this face,
With the cheeks and the tresses torn,
With shame on the brow as a brand.
We have named it of old by name,
The land of the royallest race,
The most holy land.

STR. 4

Had I words of fire,
Whose words are weak as snow;
Were my heart a lyre
Whence all its love might flow
In the mighty modulations of desire,
In the notes wherewith man's passion worships woe;

Could my song release
The thought weak words confine,
And my grief, O Greece,
Prove how it worships thine;
It would move with pulse of war the limbs of peace,
Till she flushed and trembled and became divine.

(Once she held for true
This truth of sacred strain;
Though blood drip like dew

And life run down like rain,
It is better that war spare but one or two
Than that many live, and liberty be slain.)

Then with fierce increase
And bitter mother's mirth,
From the womb of peace,
A womb that yearns for birth,
As a man-child should deliverance come to Greece,
As a saviour should the child be born on earth.

STR. 5

O that these my days had been
Ere white peace and shame were wed
Without torch or dancers' din
Round the unsacred marriage-bed!
For of old the sweet-tongued law,
Freedom, clothed with all men's love,
Girt about with all men's awe,
With the wild war-eagle mated
The white breast of peace the dove,
And his ravenous heart abated
And his windy wings were furled
In an eyrie consecrated
Where the snakes of strife uncurled,
And her soul was soothed and sated
With the welfare of the world.

ANT. 1

But now, close-clad with peace,
While war lays hand on Greece,
The kingdoms and their kings stand by to see;
"Aha, we are strong," they say,
"We are sure, we are well," even they;
"And if we serve, what ails ye to be free?
We are warm, clothed round with peace and shame;
But ye lie dead and naked, dying for a name."

ANT. 2

O kings and queens and nations miserable,
O fools and blind, and full of sins and fears,
With these it is, with you it is not well;
Ye have one hour, but these the immortal years.

These for a pang, a breath, a pulse of pain,
Have honour, while that honour on earth shall be:
Ye for a little sleep and sloth shall gain
Scorn, while one man of all men born is free.
Even as the depth more deep than night or day,
The sovereign heaven that keeps its eldest way,
So without chance or change, so without stain,
The heaven of their high memories shall nor wax nor wane.

ANT. 3

As the soul on the lips of the dead
Stands poising her wings for flight,
A bird scarce quit of her prison,
But fair without form or flesh,
So stands over each man's head
A splendour of imminent light,
A glory of fame rearsen,
Of day rearsen afresh
From the hells of night.

In the hundred cities of Crete
Such glory was not of old,
Though her name was great upon earth
And her face was fair on the sea.
The words of her lips were sweet,
Her days were woven with gold,
Her fruits came timely to birth;
So fair she was, being free,
Who is bought and sold.

So fair, who is fairer now
With her children dead at her side,
Unscattered, unconsecrated,
Unapparelled, unhelped, unpitied,
With blood for gold on her brow,
Where the towery tresses divide;
The goodly, the golden-gated,
Many-crowned, many-named, many-citied,
Made like as a bride.

And these are the bridegroom's gifts;
Anguish that straitens the breath,
Shame, and the weeping of mothers,
And the suckling dead at the breast,
White breast that a long sob lifts;

And the dumb dead mouth, which saith,
"How long, and how long, my brothers?"
And wrath which endures not rest,
And the pains of death.

ANT. 4

Ah, but would that men,
With eyelids purged by tears,
Saw, and heard again
With consecrated ears,
All the clamour, all the splendour, all the slain,
All the lights and sounds of war, the fates and fears;

Saw far off aspire,
With crash of mine and gate,
From a single pyre
The myriad flames of fate,
Soul by soul transfigured in funereal fire,
Hate made weak by love, and love made strong by hate.

Children without speech,
And many a nursing breast;
Old men in the breach,
Where death sat down a guest;
With triumphant lamentation made for each,
Let the world salute their ruin and their rest.

In one iron hour
The crescent flared and waned,
As from tower to tower,
Fire-scathed and sanguine-stained,
Death, with flame in hand, an open bloodred flower,
Passed, and where it bloomed no bloom of life remained.

ANT. 5

Hear, thou earth, the heavy-hearted
Weary nurse of waning races;
From the dust of years departed,
From obscure funereal places,
Raise again thy sacred head,
Lift the light up of thine eyes
Where are they of all thy dead
That did more than these men dying
In their godlike Grecian wise?

Not with garments rent and sighing,
Neither gifts of myrrh and gold,
Shall their sons lament them lying,
Lest the fame of them wax cold;
But with lives to lives replying,
And a worship from of old.

EPODE

O sombre heart of earth and swoln with grief,
That in thy time wast as a bird for mirth,
Dim womb of life and many a seed and sheaf,
And full of changes, ancient heart of earth,
From grain and flower, from grass and every leaf,
Thy mysteries and thy multitudes of birth,
From hollow and hill, from vales and all thy springs,
From all shapes born and breath of all lips made,
From thunders, and the sound of winds and wings,
From light, and from the solemn sleep of shade,
From the full fountains of all living things,
Speak, that this plague be stayed.
Bear witness all the ways of death and life
If thou be with us in the world's old strife,
If thou be mother indeed,
And from these wounds that bleed
Gather in thy great breast the dews that fall,
And on thy sacred knees
Lull with mute melodies,
Mother, thy sleeping sons in death's dim hall.
For these thy sons, behold,
Sons of thy sons of old,
Bear witness if these be not as they were;
If that high name of Greece
Depart, dissolve, decease
From mouths of men and memories like as air.
By the last milk that drips
Dead on the child's dead lips,
By old men's white unviolated hair,
By sweet unburied faces
That fill those red high places
Where death and freedom found one lion's lair,
By all the bloodred tears
That fill the chaliced years,
The vessels of the sacrament of time,
Wherewith, O thou most holy,

O Freedom, sure and slowly
Thy ministrant white hands cleanse earth of crime;
Though we stand off afar
Where slaves and slaveries are,
Among the chains and crowns of poisonous peace;
Though not the beams that shone
From rent Arcadion
Can melt her mists and bid her snows decrease;
Do thou with sudden wings
Darken the face of kings,
But turn again the beauty of thy brows on Greece;
Thy white and woundless brows,
Whereto her great heart bows;
Give her the glories of thine eyes to see;
Turn thee, O holiest head,
Toward all thy quick and dead,
For love's sake of the souls that cry for thee;
O love, O light, O flame,
By thine own Grecian name,
We call thee and we charge thee that all these be free.

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