

Alexander Search

MY LIFE

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I

Duty calls on me; I must fight against
That which 'tis duty unto all to fight.
Therefore, oh, illness of my will that stain'st
My mind — oh, leave me free to seek the right!

Take me from the vile sleep of purpose cold,
Give me an impulse to do good, to make
A struggle for the new against the old
Ere time my useless life away may take.

Keen is my feeling of the suffering
Of men and nations, keen into despair;
But not a will to speak it doth it bring,
Moveless I rest, not like a thing too fair,

But like a stagnant water full of filth,
A bog of will, inactive and alone,
Unopen unto Learning's fresh and tilth
And locked from doing good as men have done.

Pain ever, pain for ever! pain, oh pain!
Pain filling all my life like time or change.
Woe that goes from an inner waking strain
Unto the sleepiness of fears most strange.

Despair and horror, madness lone that feels
Its own too bitter taste until it quails,

The horror of a mind that fails and reels
And knows full well how far it reels and fails.

I sorrow for the past and at the future,
On that which never was I weep and pine,
Upon the things that never were in Nature,
On those that are and never shall be mine.

The sadness of the pleasure that has been,
The sorrow of the pain that once we had,
The ache of that which in dim visions seen
Leaves but an echo to make itself sad.

The knowledge that a dream is nothing more,
The science that our life is less than this:
It passes as it, and the bliss it wore
Was at its best the shadow of a bliss.

I ponder on the fates of men and things,
Thereat my soul grows dark and feeble grows,
To find Thought's body weighing on the wings
Which Fancy opens over fields and snows.

I ponder upon evil and on good
And both in life irrational I see,
One because it exists not, yet it should,
The other since it is and should not be.

Nothing is clear unto me; all is dark,
All is confusion to my Thought's o'er-much;
Alas for him who thinks in life to work
Having cast far away Convention's crutch.

He finds that Custom, the least thing of all,
Is king and queen and law and creed and faith,
That Custom goes not further than our pall,
That Custom is with us past our own death.

I mourn that there are thrones, prisons and tumbs,
And yet to see all ill I am half glad:
That there are deaths, decays and rots and dooms,
A gladness whose eyes sparkle, because mad.

I weep all times the limits close that must
Deep souls ununderstood in living pen,
But weeping deeply wake to the disgust
That I weep for myself in other men.

My tears are for myself; so that they teach
To know men's ineradicable woe,
What matter what high point of pain they reach?
Haply their birth one day they 'll cease to know.

And that I shall forget this pain of mine
Forget myself — ah, would that it could be!
Forgotten like the drunkard in his wine
Or like the pauper in his misery.

'Twere madness, but sweet madness, better than
The waking, fully living consciousness
That unto a full unity doth span
The many woes and throes of my distress.

'Twere madness but 'twere better than to know
That evil is the source of life and thought,
For to feel madness is the greatest woe
That upon human consciousness is wrought.

To feel excluded, miserable, lone,
A leper deep at heart, having for sore
His being, is a misery past moan
'Tis better all to have and to ignore.

'Tis better? — nay, who knows? the mystery
Of consciousness and knowledge who can find?

In madness and in thought what things may be?
How far is horror deep within the mind?

II

This is my life; what will the future be?
With horror I grow sick past sighs and tears,
To think how life is torture unto me,
How Thought is father of strange cares and fears.

Yesterday one spoke to me of my youth.
Youth? Life? Twelve years I had of happiness;
The seven since then have been without ruth —
Twelve years of sleep and seven of distress.

Time, I grow sick of thee! Sounds, motions, things,
I feel a tiredness before your eyes. . .
Give me, oh Dream of mine! thy purest wings
That I may take from solitude my cries,

That I may seek the Heaven of this life —
Death, mother of hall things that seem to be.
Die thus the hand that could not serve for strife,
The brain that strained and toiled with misery!

III

Life — what is Life? Death — what is Death? My brain
Feels as I think on this, as one that reads
Far into dusk lifts up his eyes with pain,
Aching and dim; and my heart slowly bleeds.

IV

To work? I cannot. To be gay? I've lost
Long, long ago all laughter save a base
Mirth where Despair with Apathy incrust,

That has the scent of rots and of decays.

To do good? all desire tends unto it
But all my will is feeble before all:
I am become a bult for my Thought's wit
Which is no wit but Consciousness all gall.

And what avails it e'er to toil or trouble,
To make my torture of my life and thought?
Is not all life the slander-fair soap-bubble
That by a child in empty mind is wrought?

And what avails all verse, all art and song,
All that doth make a body for itself?
My heart is keen to feel all human wrong,
I careless, as one born to ease and pelf.

And what avails it ever to grow pale
Over the mute and endless lore of old
Until the wearied senses strain and fail
And the worn heart is passionless and cold?

Avails it anything? It avails not.
Let me sleep then: give me a grave for bed
In the earth's heart where I not life nor thought
But rottenness and peace my have instead.

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