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THE VISION OF LIFE

A SYMPHONIC POEM

FOR SOPRANO AND BASS SOLI, CHORUS, AND ORCHESTRA

BY

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THE VISION OF LIFE.

The Dreamer.

From utmost distance of the dreams of thought,
The long procession comes ;
Shadows that follow shadows.

Changeless in change, tireless in weary
wandering
Death strews the path, yet the living ever
come !
Millions on millions !

No echo of their speech,
No sign of what they were ;
No wakening to wonder
Of tokens that their passing left upon the way.
Lost in long night, where no light gleams,
They passed, and passed
And were forgot.

The Dream Voices.

We wandered aimless in a world of dread ;
Wherever life was, death lurked :
We knew not hope, for us knowledge was not,
By the law of our being strife was begotten.
The weak grew strong in wariness ;
Cunning and craft were his weapons ;
He shunned the light in secret places,
And slew for safety, and found none !
The Lords of the tempest thundered :
The flame from the cloud consumed us,
The wielder of winds o'erwhelmed us,
The frosts of the night numbed us.

Homeless and houseless,
In caves and in clefts,
We hid from the terror
Of tempest and torrent,
Cowering, thirsting, shivering, starving, dying,
While the host wandered on.

The Spirit of the Vision.

Yet shines the life-sustaining Sun !
The countless stars in their allotted courses
move :
Day follows night with changless constancy :
The world its circling course fulfils,
And while the ages wander by
The weltering tumult winds its helpless way,
From out the deeps of darkness and despair
Into the light of dawn.

The weary faces brighten as thy fare ;
The words we know and welcome as our
own,
That tell of radiant youth that revels in itself,
And looks on life with eyes of wondering
joy,
With hands outstretched to grasp the cup and
drain it,
Tumultuous, eager, thronging on their way,
They take and turn to joy,
All that the wakening world can give.

The Dream Voices.

To us is the glory of beauty revealed,
The glory of all that gladdens the eye ;
The beauty of suppleness,
The beauty of speed,
Of liveness of limb and the wondrous fairness
of face.

To us is revealed the wonder of words,
The wonders of thought and the passion of
tears.

To us is revealed the delight in great deeds,
The joy in the prowess of peerless men,
The strife of the gods and the heroes.

We wielded the sword and the spear,
The bow we bent in the battle,
We drank to the depths the cup of the frenzy
of fight !

We won the welcome triumphant !
The welcome of home-coming warriors,
The shout of the saved to their saviours ;
The salt sea stayed us not,
The mountains delayed us not,
Forest and valley betrayed us not.
We won to knowledge and wisdom,
We learnt the lore of the heavens,
We knew the sun that shone for us,
The stars that made gay the sky for us,
The moon whose silvery light
Made wonderful the watches of the night !

To us the gods gave freedom and a radiant
world,
Our way was flower-strewn,
Ringing with gladness and song.

The Dreamer.

Ye may not rest, O wanderers,
Time will not wait nor stay the ruthless
rhythm of his march
To let life wander in the gardens of delight.

For other learning is your fate,
Long weary ways to tread and bitter fruit to
taste
Ere to the longed-for haven ye win.

Hark to the harsher sound,
The tramp of greed and pride !

The Voices.

Pride ! possession ! the passion of power !
To us the world and its wealth !
To us the glory of greatness !
To us the dominant dower of Empire !

The free under foot are trodden.
As slaves are they herded to serve us,
As slaves shall they slay one another,
To glut our greed for bloodshed.

Kings shall go fawning for favour.
Chieftains of the vanquished shall go chained
to our chariots.

The glitter and splendour of gold and of
purple,
The shimmer of steel, the thunder of
triumphs,
Luxury, license, wanton and limitless !
What care we when mastery wins to defiance ?
Where none dare question no right but
might !
And that right runs through the world !

The Dreamer.

To Death must all come !
How huge soe'er the mocking semblance
looms,
And all the world should be enslaved
To minister to measureless desire.
Victor and vanquished, spoiler and despoiled,
A little span and they are gone !

The Spirit of the Vision.

Yet while the roar of power triumphant rings,
A single voice, from lands remote and wild,
From humble cot of lowly peasant folk
Speaks to the travellers as they toil along
Such words as held men wondering.
Such bidding to bethink them of their need,
Such teaching of the nothingness of pride
Beside the joy of faithful brotherhood,
That ever after all the path was changed.

A heaven dawned upon their way,
Far off, and dimly dreamed,
Encircled with a halo of desire ;
And they forgot the roughness of the road,
The weary limbs, the parched throat,
The blows, the scars, the tears,
In watching far away a beacon in the sky.

The Voices.

The Empire of the proud ones passeth,
They strive with one another for the sway,
And their reward is ruin.

We watch them as we wander on,
And it is nought to us !
The world is brooding, and we go stumbling
Through wrecks of ancient learning.
The heavens are full of visions,
The air is full of voices,
And we are faint with longing
To hear the message clearly.
The spirit within us
Striveth and seeketh.
The old life is over,
The new is yet dawning.

The Spirit of the Vision.

So near to perfect joy and peace,
Their souls fulfilled with faith and love,
They linger, earthly lures forgot,
Wrapt in a dream of hope.

Does not the toilsome pathway end
Full soon and near, the haven won,
The pledge of all desire attained,
Rest to the weary given ?

Yet onwards still the shadows come,
Relentless need their steps constraining ;
The voice that called them groweth dumb,
The light of love is waning.

The Voices.

To us only is the truth known,
Ours the word that bringeth safety.
To us heaven's portals are open,
Heirs are we of endless glory.

They that heed not shall be harried,
Flame and sword shall be their portion.

March we onwards never failing,
Sure of foot and sure of future !

The Dreamer.

Faint, faint the beacon light,
Cloud, mist and gloom once more.

The pathway lost, men cry to one another in
the dark,

This way, and that way,
Deep in the hollows,
High in the bleak fells,
Striving and falling,
Wrestling and clamouring,
Working confusion,
Each laying hold of the thing that is nearest,
Snatching—grasping—lying—cheating!

The Voices.

This is mine, out on thee,
Slave that hast no rights!
Starve thou, the bread is mine!
Thirst thou, the wine is mine!
Hide thee in hovels!
Thou and thy foul brood!
Rot in the gutter!
Die in the ditch!
The earth is mine!
Its fruit is mine!
Its wealth is mine!
Thou shalt not rest,
Thou shalt not hope,
Thou shalt not think,
Thou shalt not breathe
But at my will!

The Spirit of the Vision.

Ah! baleful dower of blinded self,
The prize is poisoned!
Surfeit and despair
Are mingled in the cup the victor drains.
Red is the wild revenge the vanquished claim,
Red the swift horror of descending steel
That slays the guiltless with the vilest
In raging thirst to right such wrong.

The Dreamer.

Yet in the weltering chaos of waste words,
Slowly the madness of strife and of hatred
Yields to the spirit of love and of truth,
Dimly the certainties wake in the hearts of
men!
Certain and sure are the stars in their courses,
At dawn unfailing the great Sun upriseth;
As summer follows the spring,
As seed-time follows the flower-time,
As waves are wind-born,
And green grass rain-born;
As bird is not wingless,
Nor flame without fuel,
So are there mounting up
Witnessing certainties,
Day by day,
Year by year,
Age by age,
Ever and always,
Marvellous, obedient, faithful and fruitful.

The Voices.

Hearken, O brothers,
To the music of the song of the world!
Hear the hum of earth and air,
Feeding the forests;
Hear the bass of mighty trees,
Spreading, unfolding!
Hear the tender song of flowers expanding,
Hear the whisper of the green grass growing,
Hear the rustle of the wheat ripening,
Hear the shout of roustering winds,
Rousing the echoes,
Rousing the thunder
Of wild thronging waves!
Hear the mighty harmony of all the powers
unseen,
Orderly, steadfastly, each in their ministry
Ceaselessly singing!
Hear them and love them,
And join in their jubilant song.

The Dreamer.

Nearer they come, and ever more near!
Of our own time they are, and here!
And sweeping onwards in an endless stream,
No longer phantoms of a dream,

The form of each is clear!
There a dear familiar face!
There a friend long lost!
A child, a loved one!
Maybe there—myself!
A spectral shadow,
Doomed to strive a little space
And pass away.
What help? is there no stay,
No word of solace,
Nor a word of greeting anywhere,
To one left dreaming here alone?

The Spirit of the Vision.

None will be dreaming alone,
Nor hungering vainly for comfort!
See in the infinite distance
Where the unbroken flood moves on,
How hope and helpfulness unwearied
Make all the path a radiant mead;
And brother sees in the eyes of brother
The trust that makes toil's best reward.
They hold out hands to help the faint,
To make the stumbling footsteps sure;
They sing the song of spirits freed
From pride and fear and barren greed;
They sing the song of spirits undaunted,
Of spirits purged of earthly stain,
The everlasting song of the way made
plain.

The Voices.

We praise the men of the days long gone,
Faithful and brave, loyal and sure,
Who cleared the path their firmness won,
Making it plain for men unborn and for all
time secure.

We think with love of those who fell,
Lost in the stress, living in vain ;
Who knew not light nor wisdom's spell,
Wandering helpless, maimed and blind, con-
demned to helpless pain !

Wise ones or worthless,
Helpful or hindering,
Martyrs or cowards,
Heroes or cravens,
All pace the same path,
All face the same death.

Limitless oneness binds us together,
Passing on life from one to another.
Seeking to solve it,
Seeking to know it,
Seeking to make it of worth to each brother.

We sing the quest of the soul of man,
The same that he sang when his travels began.
To purge out the paltry and vain and base,
To make of our world a joyous place.
To find the true and to know its worth,
And to claim it for all as the right of their
birth.

We sing the joy of winning the way
To fellowship boundless and frank as the sea,
To all goodwill !—To all the light of day !
And hearts that beat high in a world of the
free !

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