

A MAN AND HIS IMAGE

All day the nations climb and crawl and pray In one long pilgrimage to one white shrine, Where sleeps a saint whose pardon, like his peace, Is wide as death, as common, as divine.

His statue in an aureole fills the shrine, The reckless nightingale, the roaming fawn, Share the broad blessing of his lifted hands, Under the canopy, above the lawn.

But one strange night, a night of gale and flood, A sound came louder than the wild wind's tone; The grave-gates shook and opened: and one stood Blue in the moonlight, rotten to the bone.

Then on the statue, graven with holy smiles, There came another smile-- tremendous--one Of an Egyptian god. 'Why should you rise? 'Do I not guard your secret from the sun?

The nations come; they kneel among the flowers Sprung from your blood, blossoms of May and June, Which do not poison them--is it not strange? Speak!' And the dead man shuddered in the moon.

Shall I not cry the truth?'--the dead man cowered-- Is it not sad, with life so tame and cold, What earth should fade into the sun's white fires With the best jest in all its tales untold?

'If I should cry that in this shrine lie hid Stories that Satan from his mouth would spew; Wild tales that men in hell tell hoarsely--speak! Saint and Deliverer! Should I slander you?'

Slowly the cowering corpse reared up its head, 'Nay, I am vile ... but when for all to see, You stand there, pure and painless--death of life! Let the stars fall--I say you slander me!

'You make me perfect, public, colourless; You make my virtues sit at ease-- you lie! For mine were never easy--lost or saved, I had a soul--I was. And where am I?

Where is my good? the little real hoard, The secret tears, the sudden chivalries; The tragic love, the futile triumph--where? Thief, dog, and son of devils--where are these?

I will lift up my head: in leprous loves Lost, and the soul's dishonourable
scars-- By God I was a better man than This That stands and slanders me
to all the stars.

'Come down!' And with an awful cry, the corse Sprang on the sacred tomb
of many tales, And stone and bone, locked in a loathsome strife, Swayed to
the singing of the nightingales.

Then one was thrown: and where the statue stood Under the canopy, above
the lawn, The corse stood; grey and lean, with lifted hands Raised in
tremendous welcome to the dawn.

'Now let all nations climb and crawl and pray; Though I be basest of my old
red clan, They shall not scale, with cries or sacrifice, The stature of the
spirit of a man.'