

THE GROWTH OF GOD

(AS DEVELOPED ON A MOONLESS NIGHT IN
THE TROPICS)

EVEN as beasts, where the sepulchral ocean
Sobs, and their fins and feet keep Runic pace,
Treading in water mysteries of motion,
Witch-dances: where the ghastly carapace
Of the blind sky hangs on the monstrous verge:
Even as serpents, wallowing in the slime;
So my thoughts raise misshapen heads, and urge
Horrible visions of decaying Time.

For in the fiery dusk arise distorted
Grey shapes in moonless phosphorus glow of
death;
The keen light of the eyes thrust back and thwarted,
The quick scent stabbed by the miasma breath.
The day is over, when the lizard darted,
A flash of green, the emerald outclassed;
Night is collapsed upon the vale: departed
All but the Close, suggestive of the Vast.

The heavy tropic scent-inspiring gloom
Clothes the wide air, the circumambient aether.

The earth grins open, as it were a tomb,
And struggling earthquakes gnash their teeth be-
neath her.

The night is monstrous: in the flickering fire
Strange faces gibber as the brands burn low;
Old shapes of hate, young phantoms of desire
More hateful yet, shatter and change and grow.

There is a sense of terror in the air,
And dreadful stories catch my breath and bind me,
Soft noises as of breathing: unaware
What devils or what ghosts may lurk behind me!
Even my horse is troubled: vain it is
Invoking memory for sweet sound of youth;
The song, the day, the cup, the shot, the kiss!
This night begets illusion—ay! the truth.

I know the deep emotion of that birth,
When chaos rolled in terror and in thunder;
The abortion of the infancy of earth;
The monsters moving in a world of wonder;
The Shapeless, racked with agony, that grew
Into these phantom forms that change and shatter;
The falling of the first toad-spotted dew;
The first lewd heaving ecstasy of matter.

I see all Nature claw and tear and bite,
All hateful love and hideous: and the brood
Misshapen, misbegotten out of spite;
Lust after death; love in decrepitude.

Thus, till the monster-birth of serpent-man
Linked in corruption with the serpent-woman,
Slavering in lust and pain—creation's ban.
The horrible beginning of the human.

The savage monkey leaping on his mate ;
The upright posture for sure murder taken ;
The gibberings modified to spit out hate :
Struggle to manhood—surely God-forsaken.
The bestial cause of Morals—fear and hate.
At last the anguish-vomit of despair,
The growth of reason—and its pangs abate
No whit : the knife replaces the arm bare.

Fear grows, and torment ; and distracted pain
Must from sheer agony some respite find ;
When some half-maddened miserable brain
Projects a God in his detesting mind.
A God who made him—to the core all evil,
In his own image—and a God of Terror ;
A vast foul nightmare, and impending devil ;
Compact of darkness, infamy, and error.

Some bestial woman, beaten by her mates,
In utter fear broke down the bar of reason ;
Shrieked, crawled to die ; delirium abates
By some good chance her terror in its season.
Her ravings picture the cessation of
Such life as she had known : her mind conceives

A God of Mercy, Happiness, and Love ;
Reverses life and fact : and so believes.

So man grew up ; and so religion grew.
Now when the aeons grow to millionfold,
Hath earth one mystery, one glory new ?
Are not these thoughts immeasurably old ?
Only—day breaks as I am musing sadly ;
The phantoms scatter—is not earth divine ?
I leap to saddle ; gallop forward madly
Into the morning strong and keen as wine.

The gold air whistles and the glad horse thunders,
Spurning the quiet woodland : now the light
Stirs bird and beast—a thousand glowing wonders
Flash into glory, lambent to the sight.
I know, I feel the Godhead set above me,
My own high part in His celestial sphere ;
In life, in death, the universe cries—love me !—
God in my heart, and all the world is dear !