

THE CAMP FIRE

To the memory of A. C. Swinburne

IN MEMORIAM A. C. S.

The meer is haunted, berylline that lies
Upon the enchanted moor, bare to the skies.
Far as the eye leaps, there is nothing seen
But Mystery, the horizon hungry and lean
Like a slim snake encompassing the air.
Subtly the lake woos, like a virgin's prayer.

No moon there was; no stars could pierce the blind
O'ertoppling mass of heaven; there was no wind.
There was no man, no beast; no sound or sight
Broke thy swart span, O brooding vulture, Night!
Where the tarn dwindled, was lost altogether,
I piled, I kindled the sparse twigs of heather
On one squat square stark rock; I struck my steel.
The sparks splash: flares the pyre, a wildering wheel
Of light that rolled, and lit the meer, and showed
A glint of gold in that inane abode.

Thus then I sate, and warmed me at the blaze,
Brooding like Fate upon my desert days.
Before the dawn, the pyre burnt through to ash,
The god withdrawn; effaced the golden gash!
I sate and shivered: so this pregnant breath
Must be delivered at the door of Death!
Poor petty torch to which our spirits flutter
Our wings to scorch! Ah, shall no angel utter
Some word to allay the universal doom?
All swept away into a dusty tomb!

My friend! who dreamt that dream of Permanence?
Are we exempt from any common sense

Was not my fire warm while it burned? Am I
No living lyre because my songs must die?
Is not Becoming Being's twin? Be mute!
Is Death's low drumming louder than Life's lute?
Was I the ass, that fed my body on
That crackling grass, long after midnight gone;
Or thou, that shivered all night long for fear
The sun delivered no dawn upon the meer?

More, canst thou tell what god may watch thy beacon,
Feed it from hell or heaven, ere it weaken,
From some anointed sceptre, fiery dew
For this appointed, that my soul win through?

Nay! all we know not anything. Yet raise,
Though we must throw our hearts to feed its blaze,
The aspiring flame, the passionate glow, the bloom
Whose root is shame, whose fruit the trackless tomb.
I wail "I know not," louder and livelier
Who laugh, and go not, shaveling sinister!
To you for help, who snarl "I know," and grasp,
Mean mongrel whelp! my bulging sporrans' clasp.

So, Swinburne, sleep! That which is written is written.
I will not weep. The torch of song is smitten
Into dry stray leaves elsehow doomed for sure
To damp decay, Victorian manure,
Miasmical squelch, black slough to mire the Sun,
The stink and belch and snivel of Tennyson!

Hail and farewell, my brother! I am he
To plant in hell thy sunkissed sea-lily
Thou has lived! As I live, stars in midnight's deep.
Thou hast died. All die; why boggle at the leap?
Serene and splendid blazed thy fire, night's sun:
Thy task is ended, brother, thy work done.

Drone on thy shore, no pæan stir thy surge!
A period to life, death, heaven, and hell!
There is no God: hail, brother! and farewell!