

Octaves

By Edwin Arlington Robinson

I

We thrill too strangely at the master's touch;
We shrink too sadly from the larger self
5 Which for its own completeness agitates
And undetermines us; we do not feel—
We dare not feel it yet—the splendid shame
Of uncreated failure; we forget,
The while we groan, that God's accomplishment
10 Is always and unfailingly at hand.

II

Tumultuously void of a clean scheme
Whereon to build, whereof to formulate,
15 The legion life that riots in mankind
Goes ever plunging upward, up and down,
Most like some crazy regiment at arms,
Undisciplined of aught but Ignorance,
And ever led resourcelessly along
20 To brainless carnage by drunk trumpeters.

III

To me the groaning of world-worshippers
Rings like a lonely music played in hell
25 By one with art enough to cleave the walls
Of heaven with his cadence, but without
The wisdom or the will to comprehend
The strangeness of his own perversity,
And all without the courage to deny
30 The profit and the pride of his defeat.

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XX

The prophet of dead words defeats himself:
35 Whoever would acknowledge and include
The foregleam and the glory of the real,
Must work with something else than pen and ink
And painful preparation: he must work
With unseen implements that have no names,
40 And he must win withal, to do that work,
Good fortitude, clean wisdom, and strong skill.

XXI

To curse the chilled insistence of the dawn
45 Because the free gleam lingers; to defraud

The constant opportunity that lives
Unchallenged in all sorrow; to forget
For this large prodigality of gold
That larger generosity of thought,—
5 These are the fleshly clogs of human greed,
The fundamental blunders of mankind.

XXII

10 Forebodings are the fiends of Recreance;
The master of the moment, the clean seer
Of ages, too securely scans what is,
Ever to be appalled at what is not;
He sees beyond the groaning borough lines
Of Hell, God's highways gleaming, and he knows
15 That Love's complete communion is the end
Of anguish to the liberated man.

XXIII

20 Here by the windy docks I stand alone,
But yet companioned. There the vessel goes,
And there my friend goes with it; but the wake
That melts and ebbs between that friend and me
Love's earnest is of Life's all-purposeful
And all-triumphant sailing, when the ships
25 Of Wisdom loose their fretful chains and swing
Forever from the crumbled wharves of Time.