

# De Profundis

By Aleister Crowley

Blood, mist, and foam, then darkness. On my eyes  
Sits heaviness, the poor worn body lies  
Devoid of nerve and muscle; it were death  
Save for the heart that throbs, the breast that sighs.

The brain reels drowsily, the mind is dulled,  
Deadened and drowned by noises that are lulled  
By the harsh poison of the hateful breath.  
All sense and sound and seeing is annulled.

Within a body dead a deadened brain  
Beats with the burden of a shameful pain,  
The sullen agony that dares to think,  
And think through sleep, and wake to think again.

Fools! bitter fools! Our breaths and kisses seem  
Constrained in devilry, debauch, and dream:  
Lives logged in the morass of meat and drink,  
Loves dipped in Phlegethon, the perjured stream.

Behold we would that hours and minutes pass,  
Watch the sands failing in the eager glass;  
To wile their weariness is pleasure's bliss;  
But ah! the years! like smoke They fade, alas!

We weep them as they slip away; we gaze  
Back on the likeness of the former days—  
The hair we fondle and the lips we kiss—  
Roses grow yellow, and no purple stays.

Ah! the old years! Come back, ye vanished hours  
We wasted; come, grow red, ye faded flowers!  
What boots the weariness of olden time  
Now, when old age, a tempest-fury, lowers?

Up to high God beyond the weary land  
The days drift mournfully; His hoary hand  
Gathers them. Is it so? My foolish rime  
Dreams they are links upon an endless band.

The planets draw in endless orbits round

The sun; itself revolves in the profound  
Black wells of space; the comet's mystic track  
By the strong rule of a closed curve is bound.

Why not with time? To-morrow we may see  
The circle ended—if to-morrow be—  
And gaze on chaos, and a week bring back  
Adam and Eve beneath the apple tree.

Or, like the comet, the wild race may end  
Out into darkness, and our circle bend  
Round to all glory, in a sudden sweep,  
And speed triumphant with the sun to friend.

Love will not leave my home. She knows my tears,  
My angers and caprices; still my ears  
Listen to singing voices, till I weep  
Once more, less sadly, and set hounds on fears.

She will not leave me comfortless. And why?  
Through the dimmed glory of my clouded eye  
She catches one sharp glint of love for her;  
She will not leave me ever till I die;—

Nay, though I die! Beyond the distant gloom  
Heaven springs, a fountain, out of Change's womb!  
Time would all men within the grave inter:—  
For Time himself shall no god find a tomb?

Glory and love and work precipitate  
The end of man's desire—so sayeth Fate.  
Man answers: Love is stronger, work more sure,  
Glory more fadeless than her shafts abate.

Though all worlds fail, the pulse of Life be still,  
God fall, all darken, she hath not her will  
Of deeds beyond recall, that shall endure  
For us, these three divinest glasses fill,

Fill to the brim with lustrous dew, nor fail  
To leave the blossom and the nightingale,  
Love's earlier kiss, and manhood's glowing prime  
Let these suffice. Shall man or Fate prevail?

Lo, we are blind, and dubious fingers grope  
In Despair's dungeon for the key of Hope;

Lo, we are chained, and with a broken rhyme  
Would file our fetters and enlarge our scope.

Yet ants may move the mountain; none is small  
But he who stretches out no arm at all  
Toadstools have wrecked fair cities in a night;  
One poet's song may bid a kingdom fall.

Add to thy fellow-men one ounce of aid—  
The block begins to shift, the start is made:  
The rest is thine; with overwhelming might  
The balance changes, and the task is paid.

Join'st thou thy feeble hands in foolish prayer  
To him thy brain hath moulded and set there  
In thy brain's heaven? Such a god replies  
As thy fears move. So men pray everywhere.

What God there be, is real. By His might  
Begot the universe within the night;  
If He had prayed to His own mind's weak lies  
Think'st thou the heaven and earth had stood upright?

Remember Him, but smite! No workman hews  
His stone aright whose nervy arms refuse  
To ply the chisel, but are raised to ask  
A visionary foreman he may choose

From the distortions of a sodden mind.  
God did first work on earth when womankind  
He chipped from Adam's rib—a thankless task  
I wot his wisdom has long since repined.

Christ touched the leper and the widow's son;  
And thou wouldst serve the work the Perfect One  
Began, by folding arms and gazing up  
To heaven, as if thy work were rightly done.

I tell thee, He should say, if ye were met:  
'Thou hadst a talent—ah, thou hast it yet  
Wrapped in a napkin! thou shalt drain the cup  
Of that damnation that may not forget

'The wasted hours!' Ah, bitter interest.  
Of our youth's capital—forgotten zest  
In all the pleasures of o'erflowing life,

Wine tasteless, tired the brain, and cold the breast!

Ah! but if with it is one good deed wrought,  
One kind word spoken, one immortal thought  
Born in thee, all is paid: the weary strife  
Grows victory. 'Love is all and Death is nought!'

Such an one wrote that word as I would meet,  
Lay my life's burden at his silver feet,  
Have him give ear if I say 'Master.' Yea!  
I know no heaven, no honour, half so sweet!

He passed before me on the wheel of Time,  
He who knows no Time—the intense sublime  
Master of all philosophy and play,  
Lord of all love and music and sweet rime.

Follow thou him! Work ever, if thy heart  
Be fervent with one hope, thy brain with art,  
Thy lips with song, thine arm with strength to smite:  
Achieve some act; its name shall not depart.

Christ laid Love's corner-stone, and Cæsar built  
The tower of glory; Sappho's life was spilt  
From fervent lips the torch of song to ignite:  
Thou mayst add yet a stone—if but thou wilt.

And yet the days stream by; night shakes the day  
From his pale throne of purple, to allay  
The tremors of the earth; day smiteth dark  
With the swift poignard dipped in Helios' ray.

The days stream by; with lips and cheeks grown pale  
On their indomitable breast we sail.  
There is a favouring wind; our idle bark  
Lingers, we raise no silk to meet the gale.

The bank slips by; we gather not its fruit,  
We plant no seed, we irrigate no root  
True men have planted; and the tare and thorn  
Spring to rank weedy vigour; poisons shoot

Into the overspreading foliage  
So as days darken into weary age  
The flowers are fewer; the weeds are stronger born,  
And hands are grown too feeble to assuage

Their venom; then, the unutterable sea!  
Is she green—cinctured with the earlier tree  
Of Life? Do blossoms blow, or weeds create  
A foul rank undergrowth of misery?

From the deep water of the bitterest brine  
Drowned children raise their arms; their lips combine  
To force a shriek; hid them go contemplate  
The cold philosophy of Zeno's shrine?

Nay, stretch a hand! Although their eagle clutch  
O'erturn thy skiff, yet it is overmuch  
To grieve for that: life is not so divine—  
I count it little grief to part with such!

We are wild serpents in a ring of fire;  
Our necks stretch out, our haggard eyes aspire  
In desperation; from the fearful line  
Our coils revulse in impotence and ire.

An idle song it was the poet sang,  
A quavering note—no brazen kettle's clang,  
But gentle, drooping, tearful. Nay, achieve!  
I can remember how the finish rang

Clear, sharp, and loud; the harp is glad to die  
And give the clarion one note silver-high.  
It was too sweet for music, and I weave  
In vain the tattered woof of memory.

Ashes and dust!  
Cold cinders dead!  
Our swords are rust;  
Our lives are fled  
Like dew on glass.  
In vain we lust  
Our hopes are sped,  
Alas! alas!  
From heaven we are thrust, we have no more trust.  
Alas!

Gold hairs and gray!  
Red lips and white!  
Warm hearts, cold clay!  
Bright day, dim night!

Our spirits pass  
Like the hours away.  
We have no light,  
Alas! alas!  
We have no more day, we are fain to say  
Alas!

In Love's a cure  
For Fortune's hate;  
In Love's a lure  
Shall laugh at Fate;  
We have tolled Death's knell;  
All streams are pure;  
We are new-create;  
All's well, all's well!  
We have God to endure, we are very sure  
All's well!

In such wise rang the challenge unto Death  
With clear high eloquence and happy breath;  
So did a brave sad heart grow glad again  
And mock the riddle that the dead Sphinx saith.

When I am dead, remember me for this  
That I bade workers work, and lovers kiss;  
Laughed with the Stoic at the dream of pain,  
And preached with Jesus the evangel—bliss.

When I am dead, think kindly, Frail my song?  
'Twas the poor utterance of an eager tongue;  
I stutter in my rime? my heart was full  
Of greater longings, more divinely wrung

By love and pity and regret and trust,  
High hope from heaven that God will be just,  
Spurn not the child because his mind was dull,  
Still less condemn him for his father's lust.

Yet I think priests shall answer Him in vain  
Their gospel of disgrace, disease, and pain,  
Shall move His heart of Love to such a wrath—  
O Heart! Turn back and look on Love again!

Behold, I have seen visions, and dreamed dreams!  
My verses eddy in slow wandering streams,  
Veer like the wind, and know no certain path—

Yet their worst shades are tinged with dawning beams!

I have dreamed life a circle or a line,  
Called God, and Fate, and Chance, and Man, divine:

I know not all I say, but through it all  
Mark the dim hint of ultimate sunshine!

Remember me for this! And when I go  
To sleep the last sleep in the slumberous snow,  
Let child and man and woman yet recall  
One little moment that I loved you so!

Let some high pinnacle my tombstone be,  
My epitaph the murmur of the sea,  
The clouds of heaven be fleeces for my pall,  
My grave one thought within the hearts of ye.

Without much strength but ever unafraid  
I sang to boy and man, to wife and maid;  
And my last whisper was, "Though shadows fall,  
Love is all triumph with a God to aid!"