

Gloria Mundi

By Walter de la Mare

Upon a bank, easeless with knobs of gold,
Beneath a canopy of noonday smoke,
I saw a measureless Beast, morose and bold,
With eyes like one from filthy dreams awoke,
Who stares upon the daylight in despair
For very terror of the nothing there.

This beast in one flat hand clutched vulture-wise
A glittering image of itself in jet,
And with the other groped about its eyes
To drive away the dreams that pestered it;
And never ceased its coils to toss and beat
The mire encumbering its feeble feet.

Sharp was its hunger, though continually
It seemed a cud of stones to ruminate,
And often like a dog let glittering lie
This meatless fare, its foolish gaze to sate;
Once more convulsively to stoop its jaw,
Or seize the morsel with an envious paw.

Indeed, it seemed a hidden enemy
Must lurk within the clouds above that bank,
It strained so wildly its pale, stubborn eye,
To pierce its own foul vapours dim and dank;
Till, wearied out, it raved in wrath and foam,
Daring that Nought Invisible to come.

Ay, and it seemed some strange delight to find
In this unmeaning din, till, suddenly,
As if it heard a rumour on the wind,
Or far away its freer children cry,
Lifting its face made-quiet, there it stayed,
Till died the echo its own rage had made.

That place alone was barren where it lay;
Flowers bloomed beyond, utterly sweet and fair;
And even its own dull heart might think to stay
In livelong thirst of a clear river there,
Flowing from unseen hills to unheard seas,
Through a still vale of yew and almond trees.

And then I spied in the lush green below
Its tortured belly, One, like silver, pale,
With fingers closed upon a rope of straw,
That bound the Beast, squat neck to hoary tail;
Lonely in all that verdure faint and deep,
He watched the monster as a shepherd sheep.

I marvelled at the power, strength, and rage
Of this poor creature in such slavery bound;
Tettered with worms of fear; forlorn with age;
Its blue wing-stumps stretched helpless on the ground;
While twilight faded into darkness deep,
And he who watched it piped its pangs asleep.