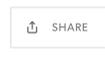




A Dialogue of Self and Soul

BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS



I

My Soul. I summon to the winding ancient stair;
 Set all your mind upon the steep ascent,
 Upon the broken, crumbling battlement,
 Upon the breathless starlit air,
 Upon the star that marks the hidden pole;
 Fix every wandering thought upon
 That quarter where all thought is done:
 Who can distinguish darkness from the soul?

My Self. The consecrated blade upon my knees
 Is Sato's ancient blade, still as it was,
 Still razor-keen, still like a looking-glass
 Unspotted by the centuries;
 That flowering, silken, old embroidery, torn
 From some court-lady's dress and round
 The wooden scabbard bound and wound,
 Can, tattered, still protect, faded adorn.

My Soul. Why should the imagination of a man
 Long past his prime remember things that are
 Emblematical of love and war?
 Think of ancestral night that can,
 If but imagination scorn the earth
 And intellect its wandering
 To this and that and t'other thing,
 Deliver from the crime of death and birth.

My Self. Montashigi, third of his family, fashioned it
 Five hundred years ago, about it lie
 Flowers from I know not what embroidery—
 Heart's purple—and all these I set
 For emblems of the day against the tower
 Emblematical of the night,
 And claim as by a soldier's right
 A charter to commit the crime once more.

My Soul. Such fullness in that quarter overflows
 And falls into the basin of the mind
 That man is stricken deaf and dumb and blind,
 For intellect no longer knows
Is from the *Ought*, or *Knower* from the *Known*—
 That is to say, ascends to Heaven;
 Only the dead can be forgiven;
 But when I think of that my tongue's a stone.

II

My Self. A living man is blind and drinks his drop.
 What matter if the ditches are impure?
 What matter if I live it all once more?
 Endure that toil of growing up;
 The ignominy of boyhood; the distress
 Of boyhood changing into man;
 The unfinished man and his pain
 Brought face to face with his own clumsiness;

The finished man among his enemies?—
 How in the name of Heaven can he escape
 That defiling and disfigured shape
 The mirror of malicious eyes
 Casts upon his eyes until at last
 He thinks that shape must be his shape?
 And what's the good of an escape
 If honour find him in the wintry blast?

I am content to live it all again
 And yet again, if it be life to pitch
 Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
 A blind man battering blind men;
 Or into that most fecund ditch of all,
 The folly that man does
 Or must suffer, if he woos
 A proud woman not kindred of his soul.

I am content to follow to its source
 Every event in action or in thought;
 Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
 When such as I cast out remorse
 So great a sweetness flows into the breast
 We must laugh and we must sing,
 We are blest by everything,
 Everything we look upon is blest.

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