

## Choruses from "The Rock"

### I

The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven,  
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit.  
O perpetual revolution of configured stars,  
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons,  
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!  
The endless cycle of idea and action,  
Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.  
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,  
But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.  
Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?  
The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries  
Bring us farther from **GOD** and nearer to the **Dust**.

I journeyed to London, to the timekept **City**,  
Where the River flows, with foreign flotations.  
There I was told: we have too many churches,  
And too few chop-houses. There I was told:  
Let the vicars retire. Men do not need the Church  
In the place where they work, but where they spend their  
Sundays.

In the City, we need no bells:  
 Let them waken the suburbs.  
 I journeyed to the suburbs, and there I was told:  
 We toil for six days, on the seventh we must motor  
 To Hindhead, or Maidenhead.  
 If the weather is foul we stay at home and read the papers.  
 In industrial districts, there I was told  
 Of economic laws.  
 In the pleasant countryside, there it seemed  
 That the country now is only fit for picnics.  
 And the Church does not seem to be wanted  
 In country or in suburbs; and in the town  
 Only for important weddings.

*CHORUS LEADER:* Silence! and preserve respectful distance.

For I perceive approaching  
 The Rock. Who will perhaps answer our doubtings.  
 The Rock. The Watcher. The Stranger.  
 He who has seen what has happened.  
 And who sees what is to happen.  
 The Witness. The Critic. The Stranger.  
 The God-shaken, in whom is the truth inborn.

*Enter the ROCK, led by a BOY:*

*THE ROCK:* The lot of man is ceaseless labour,  
 Or ceaseless idleness, which is still harder,  
 Or irregular labour, which is not pleasant.  
 I have trodden the winepress alone, and I know  
 That it is hard to be really useful, resigning  
 The things that men count for happiness, seeking  
 The good deeds that lead to obscurity, accepting  
 With equal face those that bring ignominy,  
 The applause of all or the love of none.  
 All men are ready to invest their money  
 But most expect dividends.  
 I say to you: *Make perfect your will.*  
 I say: take no thought of the harvest,  
 But only of proper sowing.

The world turns and the world changes,  
 But one thing does not change.  
 In all of my years, one thing does not change.  
 However you disguise it, this thing does not change:  
 The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.  
 Forgetful, you neglect your shrines and churches;  
 The men you are in these times deride  
 What has been done of good, you find explanations  
 To satisfy the rational and enlightened mind.  
 Second, you neglect and belittle the desert.  
 The desert is not remote in southern tropics,  
 The desert is not only around the corner,  
 The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you.  
 The desert is in the heart of your brother.  
 The good man is the builder, if he build what is good.  
 I will show you the things that are now being done,  
 And some of the things that were long ago done,  
 That you may take heart. Make perfect your will.  
 Let me show you the work of the humble. Listen.

*The lights fade; in the semi-darkness the voices of **Workmen** are heard chanting.*

In the vacant places  
 We will build with new bricks  
 There are hands and machines  
 And clay for new brick  
 And lime for new mortar  
 Where the bricks are fallen  
 We will build with new stone  
 Where the beams are rotten  
 We will build with new timbers  
 Where the word is unspoken  
 We will build with new speech  
 There is work together  
 A Church for all  
 And a job for each  
 Every man to his work.

*Now a group of **Workmen** is silhouetted against the dim sky. From farther away, they are answered by voices of the **Unemployed**.*

No man has hired us  
With pocketed hands  
And lowered faces  
We stand about in open places  
And shiver in unlit rooms.  
Only the wind moves  
Over empty fields, untilled  
Where the plough rests, at an angle  
To the furrow. In this land  
There shall be one cigarette to two men,  
To two women one half pint of bitter  
Ale. In this land  
No man has hired us.  
Our life is unwelcome, our death  
Unmentioned in "The Times."

*Chant of **Workmen** again.*

The river flows, the seasons turn,  
The sparrow and starling have no time to waste.  
If men do not build  
How shall they live?  
When the field is tilled  
And the wheat is bread  
They shall not die in a shortened bed  
And a narrow sheet. In this street  
There is no beginning, no movement, no peace and no end  
But noise without speech, food without taste.  
Without delay, without haste  
We would build the beginning and the end of this street.  
We build the meaning:  
A Church for all  
And a job for each  
Each man to his work.

## II

Thus your fathers were made  
Fellow citizens of the saints, of the household of God, being built  
upon the foundation  
Of apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself the chief cornerstone.  
But you, have you built well, that you now sit helpless in a  
ruined house?

Where many are born to idleness, to frittered lives and squalid  
deaths, embittered scorn in honey-hives,  
And those who would build and restore turn out the palms of  
their hands, or look in vain towards foreign lands for alms to  
be more or the urn to be filled.

Your building not fitly framed together, you sit ashamed and  
wonder whether and how you may be builded together for a  
habitation of God in the Spirit, the Spirit which moved on  
the face of the waters like a lantern set on the back of a  
tortoise.

And some say: "How can we love our neighbour? For love must  
be made real in act, as desire unites with desired; we have only  
our labour to give and our labour is not required.

We wait on corners, with nothing to bring but the songs we can  
sing which nobody wants to hear sung;  
Waiting to be flung in the end, on a heap less useful than dung."

You, have you built well, have you forgotten the cornerstone?  
Talking of right relations of men, but not of relations of men  
to God.

"Our citizenship is in Heaven"; yes, but that is the model and  
type for your citizenship upon earth.

When your fathers fixed the place of God,  
And settled all the inconvenient saints,  
Apostles, martyrs, in a kind of Whipsnade,  
Then they could set about imperial expansion  
Accompanied by industrial development.  
Exporting iron, coal and cotton goods

And intellectual enlightenment  
And everything, including capital  
And several versions of the Word of God:  
The British race assured of a mission  
Performed it, but left much at home unsure.

Of all that was done in the past, you eat the fruit, either rotten  
or ripe.  
And the Church must be forever building, and always decaying.  
and always being restored.  
For every ill deed in the past we suffer the consequence:  
For sloth, for avarice, gluttony, neglect of the Word of God.  
For pride, for lechery, treachery, for every act of sin.  
And of all that was done that was good, you have the inheritance.  
For good and ill deeds belong to a man alone, when he stands  
alone on the other side of death,  
But here upon earth you have the reward of the good and ill that  
was done by those who have gone before you.  
And all that is ill you may repair if you walk together in humble  
repentance, expiating the sins of your fathers;  
And all that was good you must fight to keep with hearts as  
devoted as those of your fathers who fought to gain it.  
The Church must be forever building, for it is forever decaying  
within and attacked from without;  
For this is the law of life; and you must remember that while  
there is time of prosperity  
The people will neglect the Temple, and in time of adversity  
they will decry it.

What life have you if you have not life together?  
There is no life that is not in community,  
And no community not lived in praise of God.  
Even the anchorite who meditates alone,  
For whom the days and nights repeat the praise of God,  
Prays for the Church, the Body of Christ incarnate.  
And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads.  
And no man knows or cares who is his neighbour

Unless his neighbour makes too much disturbance,  
 But all dash to and fro in motor cars,  
 Familiar with the roads and settled nowhere.  
 Nor does the family even move about together.  
 But every son would have his motor cycle,  
 And daughters ride away on casual pillions.

Much to cast down, much to build, much to restore;  
 Let the work not delay, time and the arm not waste;  
 Let the clay be dug from the pit, let the saw cut the stone.  
 Let the fire not be quenched in the forge.

## III

The Word of the **Lord** came unto me, saying:  
 O miserable cities of designing men,  
 O wretched generation of enlightened men,  
 Betrayed in the mazes of your ingenuities.  
 Sold by the proceeds of your proper inventions:  
 I have given you hands which you turn from worship,  
 I have given you speech, for endless palaver,  
 I have given you my Law, and you set up commissions,  
 I have given you lips, to express friendly sentiments,  
 I have given you hearts, for reciprocal distrust.  
 I have given you power of choice, and you only alternate  
 Between futile speculation and unconsidered action.  
 Many are engaged in writing books and printing them.  
 Many desire to see their names in print.  
 Many read nothing but the race reports.  
 Much is your reading, but not the Word of God,  
 Much is your building, but not the House of God.  
 Will you build me a house of plaster, with corrugated roofing,  
 To be filled with a litter of Sunday newspapers?

*1st Male Voice: A Cry from the East:*

What shall be done to the shore of smoky ships?  
 Will you leave my people forgetful and forgotten  
 To idleness, labour, and delirious stupor?

There shall be left the broken chimney,  
 The peeled hull, a pile of rusty iron.  
 In a street of scattered brick where the goat climbs,  
 Where My Word is unspoken.

*2nd Male Voice:* A Cry from the North, from the West and from  
 the South

Whence thousands travel daily to the timekept City;  
 Where My Word is unspoken,  
 In the land of lobelias and tennis flannels  
 The rabbit shall burrow and the thorn revisit,  
 The nettle shall flourish on the gravel court,  
 And the wind shall say: "Here were decent godless people:  
 Their only monument the asphalt road  
 And a thousand lost golf balls."

*Chorus:* We build in vain unless the Lord build with us.

Can you keep the City that the Lord keeps not with you?  
 A thousand policemen directing the traffic  
 Cannot tell you why you come or where you go.  
 A colony of cavies or a horde of active marmots  
 Build better than they that build without the Lord.  
 Shall we lift up our feet among perpetual ruins?  
 I have loved the beauty of Thy House, the peace of Thy  
 sanctuary,  
 I have swept the floors and garnished the altars.  
 Where there is no temple there shall be no homes.  
 Though you have shelters and institutions,  
 Precarious lodgings while the rent is paid,  
 Subsiding basements where the rat breeds  
 Or sanitary dwellings with numbered doors  
 Or a house a little better than your neighbour's;  
 When the Stranger says: "What is the meaning of this city?  
 Do you huddle close together because you love each other?"  
 What will you answer? "We all dwell together  
 To make money from each other"? or "This is a community"?  
 And the Stranger will depart and return to the desert.  
 O my soul, be prepared for the coming of the Stranger,  
 Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions.

O weariness of men who turn from God  
 To the grandeur of your mind and the glory of your action,  
 To arts and inventions and daring enterprises.  
 To schemes of human greatness thoroughly discredited.  
 Binding the earth and the water to your service,  
 Exploiting the seas and developing the mountains,  
 Dividing the stars into common and preferred.  
 Engaged in devising the perfect refrigerator,  
 Engaged in working out a rational morality,  
 Engaged in printing as many books as possible,  
 Plotting of happiness and flinging empty bottles,  
 Turning from your vacancy to fevered enthusiasm  
 For nation or race or what you call humanity;  
 Though you forget the way to the Temple,  
 There is one who remembers the way to your door:  
 Life you may evade, but Death you shall not.  
 You shall not deny the Stranger.

## IV

There are those who would build the Temple,  
 And those who prefer that the Temples should not be built.  
 In the days of Nehemiah the Prophet  
 There was no exception to the general rule.  
 In Shushan the palace, in the month Nisan,  
 He served the wine to the King Artaxerxes,  
 And he grieved for the broken city, Jerusalem;  
 And the King gave him leave to depart  
 That he might rebuild the city.  
 So he went, with a few, to Jerusalem,  
 And there, by the dragon's well, by the dung gate,  
 By the fountain gate, by the king's pool,  
 Jerusalem lay waste, consumed with fire;  
 No place for a beast to pass.  
 There were enemies without to destroy him.  
 And spies and self-seekers within,  
 When he and his men laid their hands to rebuilding the wall.  
 So they built as men must build  
 With the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other.

## V

O Lord, deliver me from the man of excellent intention and  
 impure heart: for the heart is deceitful above all things, and  
 desperately wicked.

Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem  
 the Arabian: were doubtless men of public spirit and zeal.

Preserve me from the enemy who has something to gain: and  
 from the friend who has something to lose.

Remembering the words of Nehemiah the Prophet: "The trowel  
 in hand, and the gun rather loose in the holster."

Those who sit in a house of which the use is forgotten: are like  
 snakes that lie on mouldering stairs, content in the sunlight.

And the others run about like dogs, full of enterprise, sniffing  
 and barking: they say, "This house is a nest of serpents, let us  
 destroy it,

And have done with these abominations, the turpitudes of the  
 Christians." And these are not justified, nor the others.

And they write innumerable books; being too vain and distracted  
 for silence: seeking every one after his own elevation, and  
 dodging his emptiness.

If humility and purity be not in the heart, they are not in the  
 home: and if they are not in the home, they are not in the City.

The man who has builded during the day would return to his  
 hearth at nightfall: to be blessed with the gift of silence, and  
 doze before he sleeps.

But we are encompassed with snakes and dogs: therefore some  
 must labour, and others must hold the spears.

## VI

It is hard for those who have never known persecution,  
 And who have never known a Christian,  
 To believe these tales of Christian persecution.

It is hard for those who live near a Bank  
 To doubt the security of their money.

It is hard for those who live near a Police Station  
 To believe in the triumph of violence.

Do you think that the Faith has conquered the World

And that lions no longer need keepers?  
 Do you need to be told that whatever has been, can still be?  
 Do you need to be told that even such modest attainments  
 As you can boast in the way of polite society  
 Will hardly survive the Faith to which they owe their signifi-  
 cance?  
 Men! polish your teeth on rising and retiring;  
 Women! polish your fingernails:  
 You polish the tooth of the dog and the talon of the cat.  
 Why should men love the Church? Why should they love her  
 laws?  
 She tells them of Life and Death, and of all that they would forget.  
 She is tender where they would be hard, and hard where they  
 like to be soft.  
 She tells them of Evil and Sin, and other unpleasant facts.  
 They constantly try to escape  
 From the darkness outside and within  
 By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be  
 good.  
 But the man that is will shadow  
 The man that pretends to be.  
 And the Son of Man was not crucified once for all.  
 The blood of the martyrs not shed once for all,  
 The lives of the Saints not given once for all:  
 But the Son of Man is crucified always  
 And there shall be Martyrs and Saints.  
 And if blood of Martyrs is to flow on the steps  
 We must first build the steps;  
 And if the Temple is to be cast down  
 We must first build the Temple.

## VII

In the beginning God created the world. Waste and void. Waste  
 and void. And darkness was upon the face of the deep.  
 And when there were men, in their various ways, they struggled  
 in torment towards God

Blindly and vainly, for man is a vain thing, and man without  
God is a seed upon the wind: driven this way and that, and  
finding no place of lodgement and germination.  
They followed the light and the shadow, and the light led them  
forward to light and the shadow led them to darkness,  
Worshipping snakes or trees, worshipping devils rather than  
nothing: crying for life beyond life, for ecstasy not of the flesh.  
Waste and void. Waste and void. And darkness on the face of  
the deep.

And the Spirit moved upon the face of the water.  
And men who turned towards the light and were known of the  
light  
Invented the Higher Religions; and the Higher Religions were  
good  
And led men from light to light, to knowledge of Good and Evil.  
But their light was ever surrounded and shot with darkness  
As the air of temperate seas is pierced by the still dead breath of  
the Arctic Current;  
And they came to an end, a dead end stirred with a flicker of life.  
And they came to the withered ancient look of a child that has  
died of starvation.  
Prayer wheels, worship of the dead, denial of this world, affirma-  
tion of rites with forgotten meanings  
In the restless wind-whipped sand, or the hills where the wind  
will not let the snow rest.  
Waste and void. Waste and void. And darkness on the face of  
the deep.

Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in time  
and of time,  
A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history:  
transecting, bisecting the world of time, a moment in time  
but not like a moment of time,  
A moment in time but time was made through that moment:  
for without the meaning there is no time, and that moment  
of time gave the meaning.

Then it seemed as if men must proceed from light to light, in the  
 light of the Word,  
 Through the Passion and Sacrifice saved in spite of their negative  
 being;  
 Bestial as always before, carnal, self-seeking as always before,  
 selfish and purblind as ever before.  
 Yet always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming their  
 march on the way that was lit by the light;  
 Often halting, loitering, straying, delaying, returning, yet fol-  
 lowing no other way.  
 But it seems that something has happened that has never hap-  
 pened before: though we know not just when, or why, or  
 how, or where.  
 Men have left God not for other gods, they say, but for no god;  
 and this has never happened before  
 That men both deny gods and worship gods, professing first  
 Reason,  
 And then Money, and Power, and what they call Life, or Race,  
 or Dialectic.  
 The Church disowned, the tower overthrown, the bells up-  
 turned, what have we to do  
 But stand with empty hands and palms turned upwards  
 In an age which advances progressively backwards?

*Voice of the Unemployed [afar off]:*

*In this land  
 There shall be one cigarette to two men,  
 To two women one half pint of bitter  
 Ale....*

*Chorus:* What does the world say, does the whole world stray in  
 high-powered cars on a by-pass way?

*Voice of the Unemployed [more faintly]*

*in this land  
 No man has hired us . . . .*

*Chorus:* Waste and void. Waste and void. And darkness on the face  
 of the deep.

Has the Church failed mankind, or has mankind failed the  
 Church?

When the Church is no longer regarded, not even opposed, and  
men have forgotten  
All gods except Usury, Lust and Power.

## VIII

O Father we welcome your words.  
And we will take heart for the future,  
Remembering the past.

The heathen are come into thine inheritance,  
And thy temple have they defiled.

Who is this that cometh from Edom?

He has trodden the wine-press alone.

There came one who spoke of the shame of Jerusalem  
And the holy places defiled;  
Peter the Hermit, scourging with words.  
And among his hearers were a few good men,  
Many who were evil,  
And most who were neither.  
Like all men in all places,

Some went from love of glory,  
Some went who were restless and curious,  
Some were rapacious and lustful.  
Many left their bodies to the kites of Syria  
Or sea-strewn along the routes;  
Many left their souls in Syria,  
Living on, sunken in moral corruption;  
Many came back well broken,  
Diseased and beggared, finding  
A stranger at the door in possession:  
Came home cracked by the sun of the East  
And the seven deadly sins in Syria.

But our King did well at Acre.  
 And in spite of all the dishonour,  
 The broken standards, the broken lives,  
 The broken faith in one place or another,  
 There was something left that was more than the tales  
 Of old men on winter evenings.  
 Only the faith could have done what was good of it.  
 Whole faith of a few,  
 Part faith of many.  
 Not avarice, lechery, treachery,  
 Envy, sloth, gluttony, jealousy, pride:  
 It was not these that made the Crusades,  
 But these that unmade them.

Remember the faith that took men from home  
 At the call of a wandering preacher.  
 Our age is an age of moderate virtue  
 And of moderate vice  
 When men will not lay down the Cross  
 Because they will never assume it.  
 Yet nothing is impossible, nothing,  
 To men of faith and conviction.  
 Let us therefore make perfect our will.  
 O God, help us.

## IX

Son of Man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears  
 And set thine heart upon all that I show thee.  
 Who is this that has said: the House of God is a House of Sorrow;  
 We must walk in black and go sadly, with long-drawn faces.  
 We must go between empty walls, quavering lowly, whispering  
 faintly,  
 Among a few flickering scattered lights?  
 They would put upon God their own sorrow, the grief they  
 should feel  
 For their sins and faults as they go about their daily occasions.  
 Yet they walk in the street proudnecked, like thoroughbreds  
 ready for races,

Adorning themselves, and busy in the market, the forum,  
 And all other secular meetings.  
 Thinking good of themselves, ready for any festivity,  
 Doing themselves very well.  
 Let us mourn in a private chamber, learning the way of peni-  
 tence,  
 And dien let us learn the joyful communion of saints.

The soul of Man must quicken to creation.  
 Out of the formless stone, when the artist united himself with  
 stone,  
 Spring always new forms of life, from the soul of man that is  
 joined to the soul of stone;  
 Out of the meaningless practical shapes of all that is living or  
 lifeless  
 Joined with the artist's eye, new life, new form, new colour.  
 Out of the sea of sound the life of music,  
 Out of the slimy mud of words, out of the sleet and hail of verbal  
 imprecisions,  
 Approximate thoughts and feelings, words that have taken the  
 place of thoughts and feelings,  
 There spring the perfect order of speech, and the beauty of  
 incantation.

Lord, shall we not bring these gifts to Your service?  
 Shall we not bring to Your service all our powers  
 For life, for dignity, grace and order.  
 And intellectual pleasures of the senses?  
 The Lord who created must wish us to create  
 And employ our creation again in His service  
 Which is already His service in creating.  
 For Man is joined spirit and body,  
 And therefore must serve as spirit and body.  
 Visible and invisible, two worlds meet in Man;  
 Visible and invisible must meet in His Temple;  
 You must not deny the body.

Now you shall see the Temple completed:  
 After much striving, after many obstacles:  
 For the work of creation is never without travail;  
 The formed stone, the visible crucifix,  
 The dressed altar, the lifting light,  
     Light  
     Light  
     The visible reminder of Invisible Light.

## X

You have seen the house built, you have seen it adorned  
 By one who came in the night, it is now dedicated to God.  
 It is now a visible church, one more light set on a hill  
 In a world confused and dark and disturbed by portents of fear.  
 And what shall we say of the future? Is one church all we can  
     build?  
 Or shall the Visible Church go on to conquer the World?

The great snake lies ever half awake, at the bottom of the pit  
     of the world, curled  
 In folds of himself until he awakens in hunger and moving his  
     head to right and to left prepares for his hour to devour.  
 But the Mystery of Iniquity is a pit too deep for mortal eyes to  
     plumb. Come  
 Ye out from among those who prize the serpent's golden eyes,  
 The worshippers, self-given sacrifice of the snake. Take  
 Your way and be ye separate.  
 Be not too curious of Good and Evil;  
 Seek not to count the future waves of Time;  
 But be ye satisfied that you have light  
 Enough to take your step and find your foothold.

O Light Invisible, we praise Thee!  
 Too bright for mortal vision.

O Greater Light, we praise Thee for the less;  
The eastern light our spires touch at morning,  
The light that slants upon our western doors at evening.  
The twilight over stagnant pools at batflight,  
Moon light and star light, owl and moth light,  
Glow-worm glowlight on a grassblade.  
O Light Invisible, we worship Thee!

We thank Thee for the lights that we have kindled,  
The light of altar and of sanctuary;  
Small lights of those who meditate at midnight  
And lights directed through the coloured panes of windows  
And light reflected from the polished stone,  
The gilded carven wood, the coloured fresco.  
Our gaze is submarine, our eyes look upward  
And see the light that fractures through unquiet water.  
We see the light but see not whence it comes.  
O Light Invisible, we glorify Thee!

In our rhythm of earthly life we tire of light. We are glad  
when the day ends, when the play ends; and ecstasy is too  
much pain.  
We are children quickly tired: children who are up in the night  
and fall asleep as the rocket is fired; and the day is long for  
work or play.  
We tire of distraction or concentration, we sleep and are glad  
to sleep,  
Controlled by the rhythm of blood and the day and the night  
and the seasons.  
And we must extinguish the candle, put out the light and  
relight it;  
Forever must quench, forever relight the flame.  
Therefore we thank Thee for our little light, that is dappled  
with shadow.  
We thank Thee who hast moved us to building, to finding, to  
forming at the ends of our fingers and beams of our eyes.

And when we have built an altar to the Invisible Light, we may  
set thereon the little lights for which our bodily vision is made.  
And we thank Thee that darkness reminds us of light.  
O Light Invisible, we give Thee thanks for Thy great glory!