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# THE VOICE OF THE OCEAN

## BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

### *VERSE:*

THE CALLING OF THE SEA.

### *PROSE:*

THE HOUSE ON THE  
BORDERLAND.

THE GHOST PIRATES.

MEN OF THE DEEP WATERS.

CARNACKI, THE GHOST  
FINDER.

THE BOATS OF THE GLEN  
CARRIG.

CAPTAIN GAULT.

THE NIGHT LAND.

THE LUCK OF THE STRONG.

**THE VOICE  
OF THE  
OCEAN**

**BY**

**WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON**

**LONDON:**

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*First printed 1921*

*Almost indeed  
I wish I now were dead  
Could I but shine some light  
Along the path I sped,  
To cheer the stumbling hearts across the night,  
A light to souls in need.*

*W.H.H.*

---

# THE VOICE OF THE OCEAN

Upon one clear, cool day, when little winds  
Played a soft chime upon the ocean's bells,  
Passed a great steamer on its way from shore  
Bearing to far off lands a multitude  
Of the small souls which form the staple part  
Of this old world's inhabitants. And they,  
To pass the time away, with much small talk  
Skimmed o'er the surface of the Sea of Thought,  
Having no thought of drowning in its depths  
Through very lack of knowledge that 'twas deep.

Said one of highest breed and leanest brain:—

"'Tis foolishness this vain belief in God,  
Who is He?—No one knows, nor ever will;  
He is but Something born within the minds  
Of mankind in the mass—WE know too well  
How empty is such thought; and, knowing this,  
We live our lives content; for soon the end  
Shall come, and we shall be no more at all."

Thus ended he. The woman smiled, to whom  
He had thus posed as a philosopher;  
Then simpered on from God to talk of dress.

But lo! from all the sea a murmur rose,  
Impressive to the wise because it held  
Meaning beyond the common words of man:  
Yet those upon the deck took little heed;  
They knew it not; but thought it was the wind  
Mournful among the waves. And so they passed.

Yet I, who had been wise through dying soon,  
Heard and interpreted, and this it was:—

"I have seen God! And who are ye who say,  
With such assurance, that there is no God?  
Again, I ask, Who are ye, and from whence?  
And asking, laugh your littleness to scorn,  
For even your beginnings are not known  
To ye, O small and febrile things, who flash  
In one short instant through your small gamut  
Of feelings insignificant, and whose  
Whole life and knowledge are no more than breath,  
Measured according to my pulsing heart!

"Did ye then live in those unknown, strange days,  
When God and I conversed, and He, abroad  
Upon my seething waters, spoke of you,  
As of some things that were to come at last,  
In some dim future time when this round world  
Was fitted for ye by the hands of Time?"

The voice was quiet a moment; then again  
It hushed to silence every tinkling wave,  
And thus it spoke:—

"Listen, and ye shall learn!—

In the abyss of time, when God was young,  
When heaven was one void of holy light,  
When the great stars slept in the future's womb,  
And human atoms were undreamt of dust,  
There swept from far beyond time's spaceless sea  
A sound of thunder—'twas the voice of God,  
And at the sound the solemn light was gapped,  
Dark streakings fled across it, and there grew,  
Amid the calmer light, clots of hot fire,  
As light drew unto light—rotating flames,  
As the pale light of heav'n massed into shapes—  
The nebula of unformed suns, and grew  
Smaller, by aeons, casting off loose worlds,  
Their flaming children, which in turn gave birth  
To lesser worlds of fire, and so was born  
The universe of suns and worlds, of which  
This fireless world is part, as is one grain  
Of sand a portion of some mighty waste.

"Ages passed on; then was I born to life,  
Born into life with the hot blood of fire,  
Floating with thunders on the breath of flames.

"In infancy and childhood, wrapped in steam,  
I slept through centuries, anon disturbed  
With the fierce tumult by my passions wrought,  
Till after many ages I awoke  
And looked around upon a world of war,  
Where great volcanoes—torches for the gods,  
Lit the black dome which canopied the world.

"Aeons fled onward whilst I fought and learnt,  
And so I came to know of God till we  
Talked many an age of years—He teaching me  
From the surrounding chaos of the world  
Dread lessons writ in storms and roaring fires  
Till, somewhat, I perceived the mighty sense  
Speaking within the tumult of the earth—  
Shouting of life on life, of things beyond  
My youthful intellect and younger heart,  
Teaching the waiting lesson; so at last  
Was I prepared to bear my wondrous task.

"The world had sunk to quietness ere I knew  
The full import of that which ailed in me:  
I scarce could rest in peace, so strange I felt.

"Pregnant I was—uneasy in my calm,  
Until my time was full for giving birth;  
Then, 'mid the shakings of a mighty storm,  
I lay convulsed in agony, while winds  
Screamed in terrific unison. On high  
God looked down on to me all sorrowing,  
And all unable to give help or ease.

So through tremendous years of pain, my voice  
Shouted my grief across a quaking sky,  
So that the unavailing winds, all drowned  
Within that star-loud, reverberating sound,  
Seemed but as gentle whispers—purling streams  
Blent in the roar of some stupendous fall.  
And lo! when it was o'er, around my breasts,  
White with the foamy milk of life, there lay  
Upon my midnight waters, vastly grim,  
Ten-thousand times ten-thousand souls new born,  
Like scarcely fallen snow-flakes on dark rocks.

"Thus was creation now achieved, and so,  
In his right time, man was evolved, and grew  
Into his present shape, with underneath  
His heavier flesh, a soul such as was born  
In that supremely distant time, when man,  
As ye now know him, was undreamt of earth!"

Some hours of silence followed, while the Sea  
Rested, as though communing with itself,  
Till, in the West, the night soared up on wings  
Of gorgeous colours, that too soon were grey.

Then, as the dark came down upon the Sea,  
Strange voices called from the surrounding air—  
Sadness and want spoke chiefly in their tones,  
Though all were not thus, as thou soon shalt hear.

Then from the Sea a whisper rose, and said:—

"Hark ye, these be the souls of those who sleep,  
Perchance, in distant countries, while their minds  
Steal out across my waters seeking rest,  
Or wisdom. Yet when they awake have they  
No knowledge nor remembrance, save it be  
Something of which they think as dim-lit dreams."

From the surrounding voices one broke clear,  
Despair and doubt in every tone it seemed:—

"Thou Bodyless Thing in the sky,  
Wherefore am I?  
For why so alone?  
Ah! Master of Death,  
For why this mad breath?  
Which Thou could'st allay,  
Nor lengthen my stay  
Upon this drear planet of stone."

'Twas thus the Sea replied:—

"Thou art alone  
Because by loneliness thou shalt be taught  
The hideous solitude which Sin doth cast  
About the soul. Thy present loneliness  
May serve to save thy soul from future woe;

So bear it as thou canst.

"As for thy breath,

Learn now to temper thy hot soul with strength  
From the surrounding air. Curtail all vice,  
And work to strengthen that which was thy will,  
Thus may this stony planet prove a joy,  
Because upon it thou shalt work, through hope,  
To further knowledge and the joy of peace.

"Thou askest why thou art. I cannot tell,  
Save that it be God's Will; and only He  
In the whole breadth of space can answer thee.

"Now pass thee on with mind intent to live  
So that thou shalt attain to peace at last."

Scarcely had the Sea finished when I heard,  
From the encircling silence, one sad voice:—

"O, Sea, I have been lonely  
For years afar from thee!

Dumb 'mid an earless People, I strove to speech, in vain.  
I had been better served had I  
But held my peace as life passed by,  
And silent borne my pain!

"I spoke about God's bounty,  
But sneers were all my gain;  
I held out hope with both my hands;  
I sang of God's glad Wonder-Lands,  
Yet it was all in vain!"

It ceased, and through the stillness that befell  
The Sea made answer so my soul was glad:—

"To only the unthinking mind appears  
The thought that he who casts himself on spears  
Has failed. I tell you he has won  
The highest prize; I care not where he aimed!  
For, you must know, 'tis *he* who leads the van—  
Weak souls may *follow* after one such man!"

In the succeeding quietness, low I caught  
A quick, sweet sob of gladness, and I knew  
That one beweighted heart within the world  
Was saved from failure's burden. While great Hope  
Thrilled in the soul of one who had been sore;  
Revivifying faith to greater life.

And now the voice of one a-dying crept  
Sadly across the night to me. It seemed  
Full of a sadness, past all comforting:—

"Must it be adieu, O, Sea,  
Must it be adieu?  
The very thought is pain to me,  
Yet, from thy quivering blue,  
I seem to hear thy sad assent,

For whispers come from thee,  
    (Soft as the weeping of the dew,  
    Like sorrowing voices sadly blent,  
Telling that it must be——"

The voice trailed off to silence, and the Sea  
Thus made reply in a most saddened voice:—

"Full well I share thy grief—To-morrow's dawn  
Shall steal across my breast and find thee not:  
O, bitter are all partings! Yet they serve  
But to enhance our love. Pray thou to God  
That we shall meet some other time, elsewhere,  
If not upon this world.

"Now comfort thee!  
And fear not death; it is thy greatest friend,  
Its pain is but the birth to fuller life,  
And after that again to life more vast,  
Until thou hast attained to the Last Life.  
Where thou shalt breathe deep life beyond belief.

Ah! now good-bye—good-bye! God grant thee speed  
Through the strange birth of death—through all thy deaths!"

Sadly an answer wailed across the Sea:—

"When I am dead, O, Sea,  
    As a strange mist upon thy breast  
Shall I float back to thee,  
    Out from the great and dark unrest  
Of all eternity!"

The Sea's voice, singing sadly, then replied:—

"Dear piteous soul,  
    Be comforted!  
    When thou art dead  
(Though multitudes of ages roll)  
    My old, sad heart  
    Shall dream of thee,  
    Who feeleth now death's bitter smart;  
    And if thou should'st come back to me  
    How gladly would my billows cry  
    Their joy to thee  
    Who art about to die!

"Be comforted! Be comforted!  
When thou art dead,  
I shall still dream of thee  
When thou hast long forgotten me!"

In sadness and in doubt now spoke the soul:—

"After my death, if all alone I tread  
My ghostly way along thy lonely coasts,  
*Wilt thou still know me?* Or shall I be lost



Unto thy sight, and seem no more than mist  
Floating upon thy fringe, hair dipt in spume?"

In deep emotion spoke the Sea thuswise:—

"Thou who dost love me so, I cannot tell,  
Save that it seems to me thy very love  
Shall show thy soul to me amid the mists:  
Then shall I take thee to my heart till thou  
Art comforted enough to go to God.

"Ah! then, indeed, thou shalt begin to learn  
That love as mine and thine is cold as death,  
Beside the passion that God has for souls!"

The Ocean ceased from speaking, and the soul  
Slid down upon the Sea to rest, while far  
From some benighted land a sound of bells,  
Ringing a solemn knell, told of some death;  
And the vast Sea in sympathy replied  
With the deep beatings of its mighty heart.

And from far down a sound of singing rose,  
As though a wondrous requiem were sung—  
A requiem full of sadness; but with hope  
Sounding most splendidly among its notes.

A certain time passed on, and then a voice  
From some long distant shore came o'er the Sea  
Most hopeless in its sadness. And it seemed  
It moaned in hollow notes this epitaph:—

"Sleep thou in thy bed of clay,  
In that darkness where no light  
Comes to wake thee from thy rest,  
Comes to wake thy lasting night:  
Shut from gleam of earthly day  
Slumber on, for so 'tis best!

"One brief moment it may seem  
Ere a trumpet's note shall sound,  
And thy rested soul shall rise  
From its bed of clay embound,  
From that long and silent dream  
To a Judgment in the skies."

Somewhat impatient, then exclaimed the Sea:—

"Much nonsense is contained within such lines!  
There is no need for judgment. Thou shalt live  
In many lives among thy deeds until  
Thou shalt attain to the Last Life. How then  
Shalt thou need judging when thou art involved.  
For evermore in all that thou hast worked,  
Both good and harmful?

"Nay, there is no need  
Of judgment; for thou mightest quite as well  
Talk of such things to one who has prepared

A bed of holly thorns on which to sleep,  
His punishment's assured. Leave him alone!

"Likewise, hath one prepared a couch of peace,  
There is no need for judgment. He is sure  
Of a most joyous sleep. Leave him alone!

"Thus art thou making to thyself a bed,  
For all eternity, compact of deeds,  
On which to lie. And whether, or not, thy rest  
Be peaceful doth depend upon thyself!

"Thou weavest thine own shroud, or thine own robe,  
The death of joy, or greater bliss of life.

"'Tis all a matter for thine own concern,  
For thou thyself must suffer thine own harm;  
Likewise, enjoy all good that thou hast worked  
Throughout all time.

"So, truly, shalt thou learn  
That thine own deeds are thy remorseless judges!"

Soul:—"O, Sea,  
I cannot e'er agree  
With thy strange teachings, which seem blasphemy  
To me!"

Sea:—"Some judgment of the kind  
Thou holdest in thy mind.  
Why must  
Distrust  
Still torture humankind?"

Soul:—"O, Sea,  
It seems to me  
All mankind shall be judged  
And weighed;  
It shall not be delayed;  
Nor past the book of sin  
Can any human win,  
Nor any record from its page be smudged!"

Sea:—"O, soul,  
With pondering  
Upon the final goal—  
With much long wondering  
I tired, to slumbering,  
And in my sleep I dreamed  
Thy Judgment Day had come  
With its tremendous sum  
Of threatened misery,  
And this is how it seemed  
As I lay sleepily——"

Soul:—"One moment, Sea!  
Art speaking seriously?  
Thou speakest with such zest,  
Methinks thou hast some jest  
Lurking within thy breast!"

The Sea spoke not awhile; but rested, and began:—

"'Twas in my dreams I heard a trumpet's note  
Come ringing down the aisles of time in throbs—  
The last, long bugle-call sound o'er the world,  
A clang'rous, threatening bray that shivered through  
And through my soul.

"My heart-beats seemed to cease

As from the heaving earth I saw drive up  
The misty forms of long forgotten dead.  
Forgotten now no longer, fast they came,  
Piecemeal and limbless—dreadful in their shrouds;  
But growing every moment into shape  
As flying limbs came jostling through the air  
In anxious haste to take a rightful place.

"Thus, as I watched, came to them face and form;  
But lo! unheard, unthought of thing, their clothes  
Had failed to resurrect, and thus each one  
Stood naked on the earth, while that bold sun  
Looked down with brazen face upon it all,  
And smiled, an awesome, wicked smile, as though  
It all along had known, forseen that this  
Should be; that these poor dames and gentlemen  
Should stand unclothed in punishment to see  
Their manifold transgressions written large  
Upon each others naked breasts; so thus  
Each man, each woman, knew the others worth  
At once, for all time, in a single glance.

"I saw them look and then attempt to hide  
Their nakedness. No use! They had no clothes!  
And God looked grimly down from that white throne.  
"Then, like a thunder-peal, His voice rang out  
To those poor shiv'ring corpses:—

"Let the dead  
Make haste their dead to bury from Mine eyes;  
For sure am I that this offends My sight!"

"At once each wakeful corpse began to throw  
The moist brown earth upon a neighbour's head,  
And each, retaliating, cast it back,  
Until a plain of heaving, rolling mould  
Ran undulating where awhile before  
Had stood those shame-faced corpses. And above,  
God smiled a stern and bitter smile as He  
Watched their endeavour, all their pitiful toil  
To hide each other from themselves and Him.  
"And yet, methought the sternness of His smile  
Had something in it tender, as He grasped  
The grim, pathetic humour of it all.

"And then I waked, and knew it for a dream—  
A dream to me—a nightmare to the world  
Who swallow that which Reason doth reject."

The Sea ceased from its humour, and the soul,

Disgusted and abashed, now held its peace.

A little time passed by; then was the night  
Rent with the screamings of a frightened soul:—

"O, Jesu, in the hour of death, I pray  
To Thee, O Tender One, in my distress—  
Save Thou my frightened soul from this cold grasp!  
Receive me, O my Christ, in Thine embrace.

"I cannot face these loathly terrors felt;  
I shrink from THIS! My Jesu, hear my prayer;  
Turn not away; O Christ, turn not away!  
The fiend has me!—Jesu, my Christ, *assist!*  
Thou would'st not leave me, Christ—No! Jesu, No!  
Think of the PIT, my Christ! Think of the PIT!  
The gaping, hideous PIT!—God save my soul  
From this Vast Foulness! Spare me, O my God!  
Thou canst not fail me, God above! I weep  
In misery most abject, God of Love;  
Yes, love *me*, SAVE ME!—God, Thou canst not fail!  
In Jesu's name I ask it—Thou S-H-A-L-T hear!—  
God!— O God!!— *THE PIT!!!* 'Tis opening wide  
For me, Father, My God!— Jesu, My C-H-R-I-S-T—!  
Jesu!— Jesu! I'm— Oh! My God!—  
G ———— O ———— D ————  
—————!"

The voice died in one shriek. And silence reigned,  
As though the very night, with pity, held  
Its breath in sympathy for that poor soul  
Deeming itself already doomed, ere death  
Could prove to it that joy was not at end.

Then, in soliloquy, the Sea's low voice  
Sounded most solemnly across the dark—

Rising, wailing, strange and solemn,  
Sad, inhuman—yet all loving,  
Trailing upward from the deep,  
Singing from a cold abyss,  
Crying from a clouded gloom:

"O, that such fear exists doth sorrow me!  
How dreadful is religion that doth teach  
Such terror to an erring soul!

"E'en now  
That soul, whose agony ye heard, has waked  
To further life—to greater wisdom, and  
To *hope renewed!*

"Dost think ye are condemned  
Or ever ye have felt sweet wisdom's touch?  
O, nay! nay! God worketh not thuswise—

"True! ye shall not escape your wrongful deeds;  
But He doth mean ye shall have had fair chance  
To win to joy, ere ye reach the Last Life.

"How think ye, born in ignorance as *this*,  
God (Justice) would allow ye to be doomed

To joyless aeons of actual agony,  
Without good chance to win to aeons of joy?  
"O, nay! though your wrong deeds shall punish ye,  
I tell ye, once again, ye shall have chance  
To win from grief in newer, greater lives,  
With wisdom in your brains, peace in your hearts,  
Growing from present seed to magnitude  
Beyond belief in this first stage of life  
Where ignorance doth flourish for a time."

A further space passed by, and then there came  
A voice exalted with the wine of sin,  
A woman's voice it was; thuswise it ran:—

"Not even Thou, O God, canst rob  
From me this hour of earthly joy,  
And afterwards, Thou may'st destroy  
My very soul—I care no jot  
If in Thy Hell I lie and rot!  
O'er sin itself I ride above  
Upon the splendour of my love——!"

It ended suddenly as if 'twere checked  
By retributive Right. Then spake the Sea  
In a sad, thoughtful voice which seemed to pierce  
To Reason's very deep, and echo there  
From its cold bottom to the topmost skies:—

"Poor child! Hast thou e'er thought upon thy death  
As a cessation from the joys of earth?  
Then know that every death thou diest leads on  
To a much fuller life, including all  
That thou hast thought and lived in those before.  
And as a fuller life implies more power  
To live, to understand, to suffer pain,  
So may'st thou comprehend that on each life  
Shall stand thy cause to suffer pain or joy  
When the Last Life be reached, and thou shalt live  
In culmination of all joy and grief  
That thou hast ever known in all thy lives.

"Pass on, pass on. I would not chide at all;  
But warn thee and direct, so that thou shalt,  
In the Last Life, have no sad cause to wail  
O'er wanton moments birthing aeons of pain."

Then from the rounding spirits one spoke out  
In the thin tone of age—an old man's voice:—

"Ah! would I could attain back to my youth  
When but to live was to be praising God!  
Odd times I get some whiff of that old joy;  
Within the scent of roses it steals back—  
The old delicious smell of happy youth,  
And then it drifts away, and I am left  
Older, by contrast, than I was before.

"So when church bells come pealing softly past

Over some grassy hill, within the dusk,  
Doth the low pastoral sound fill me with peace  
Brimming with echoes of my childhood's days.

"And then the dark ahead, that draweth near,  
Comes down upon me like a blank dismay,  
And I am filled with fears, and scarcely can  
Believe in life past death; for faith comes hard  
When the tremendous moment is at hand."

Thus spake the Sea:—

"Be of good cheer, old man,  
When thou art dead, time's space shall be thy road;  
Thou shalt pass back or forward as thou wilt.  
To happiest moments of past lives, thy soul  
May dart along time's road to old delights—  
Living long ages in one pang of joy:  
Thus thou shalt reach the days of childhood's joys.  
And live there till thy soul hath grown at last  
To a desire to taste the fuller zest  
That waits on manhood in a greater life."

Scarce had the Sea grown silent when I heard  
A voice come shrilly laughing o'er the sea:—

"Ha! Ha!—Ha! Ha!  
Get Thee to Thy kingdom, God!  
I laugh at Thee!  
Thou threatenest with a rod  
That doth not frighten me;  
What indeed's Thy Hell to me?  
God, I have no fear of Thee!  
Heaven and Hell have never been,  
Save within men's wildered minds,  
Dazed by light which only blinds,  
Nor art Thou, I truly ween!  
Here I live as pleases me—  
When I've lived as likes me best  
I shall die and be at rest.  
Hark! O Phantom Deity!  
Ha! Ha!—Ha! Ha!"

The Sea's voice came in quietly. Such contempt  
I ne'er had dreamed existed.

Thus it spake:—

"Dost know, poor thing, that, somewhere on time's plain,  
Ten-thousand aeons hence thy cackling laugh  
Shall sound to thy distress?"

"O, Ignorance!  
No deed shall die, nor has, nor ever can!  
Each moment that has been, forever lives;  
Thou art now being born somewhere in time;  
Thy mother's pangs are still existent. Thou  
Art still essaying thy first breath on earth!"

So each deed thou hast wrought still lives. Thou art  
E'en now (*and for all time*) most horribly  
Intent upon the lowest deed that e'er  
Thy brains and hands have worked to thy dishonour,  
For God and all Immortals who may care  
To watch thee.

"Ah! poor thing! When thou hast died  
Thou shalt stand high above that plain, and watch,  
Among the past, but living, hours, thyself  
Doing such things as shall break thee with shame.  
Ah! then shalt surely learn that heaven and hell  
Are made up of thy deeds of good and harm;  
For in the Last Life thou shalt greatly live  
Amid all good and evil thou hast wrought!

"E'en now thy life I see—a tiny track  
Smudging time's plain with filth a little way,  
And little scenes show clearly that do grieve  
Most utterly my heart; for thou hast filled  
This life unto its brim with future griefs.

"O, if thou could'st but understand this thing,  
That back within time's space eternally,  
Before and after death, and all the while,  
Thy deeds are still enacted—good and bad!

"Do thou but wander back along time's road  
Thou shalt come to the years of bygone lives,  
And see thyself in sickly ignorance  
Working the woeful deeds thou now dost work.

"Poor soul! Spite of contempt, I feel within,  
For thee, more pity than thou can'st conceive,  
Thou hast laid up such sorrow for thyself!"

Now, from above, there crept a moaning sound,  
As though one spoke among the distant stars;  
Awhile I waited till the words were clear,  
And thus:—

"Quiet, O ye heavens while we speak!  
God of all gods, through the eternal night,  
Loaded with dead, we march enwrapped in gloom;  
Ten-thousand ages gone we rode in life,  
Strong with the germ that lives where'er is light,  
And bearing on a myriad life, where death  
Played its sad havoc to exterminate  
But all in vain; for from our mighty hearts  
Pulsed a life-stream which death could not subdue.  
Yet, by Thy will, because of length of days,  
*Our* time drew near for death. Our blazing suns  
Gave but a saddening light which dwindled on  
From red to deeper red, until in gloom  
We sank into vast graves of all that had  
Lived on our bosoms in the days of light.

"This have we borne, O God, but in the hope  
That Thou would'st succour us to further life;  
Else if we thus must die with all our souls,

What use hath been our life? 'Twere better far  
We had not lived at all, than come to this—  
Dark, hideous bulks of death within the void!

"O God, if Thou art, as we have believed,  
Almighty past our power to understand,  
Then shalt Thou give us further life, or Thou  
Art but abusing Thine Almighty Strength!"

Then spake the Sea:—

"Patience, thou deathly worlds!

God's Might is right, because that self-same Might  
Is governed and directed by a Mind  
Born of the awful strength which lives in God.  
And as a Mind so born and so sustained  
Must be of breadth and height beyond finite,  
So doth God justice where the finite mind  
Would fail contemptibly to mete out right;  
Using its puny mind and puny strength  
Unwittingly to forward some abuse,  
Because of insufficient might to reach  
To heights where justice may be dealt out pure.

"Now have thou patience, for no mind can guess  
What the vast womb of time may hold concealed;  
Yet of one thing thou may'st well be assured,  
That all development is worked through change;  
So dies the corn ere born to further life,  
One ear to life an hundred times as great;  
So may'st thou live again, for bear in mind  
That in the furthest limit of all space  
A lonely universe of silent worlds,  
Dead aeons before thou had'st been nebula,  
May on some orbit vast be nearing thee,  
Though half eternity should pass ere they  
Meet thee in full career. Ah! then the skies  
Shall witness thy new birth, as in one bound  
Dead world shall leap unto dead world, and each  
Shall flash from death to life within one breath—  
To life for some long age of mightier life,  
Tremendous in one flame as new as love.

"Bear this in mind to help thee through the aeons,  
And know thou all the while within thy soul  
That the last sorrows of ten-thousand worlds  
Are stored within the tender heart of God."

The Sea then ceased from speaking, and a voice,  
Of one who would talk boastful, sounded loud:—

"Wondrous is God. But, surely, as all good  
Springeth from His deep heart, so none may doubt  
(If He be the Creator of all things)  
Likewise, that from His breast all evil floats,  
Pervading this whole world. For He is proud,  
And when He stumbles none may put Him right,  
Nor whisper in His winds reproveful words,



Wherefore should He condemn us when we fall?"

The question now propounded, did the voice  
Stop with a foolish triumph in its tone,  
At which the Sea grew angry, and fierce words  
Leapt through the mad white welter of quick waves,  
As its abysmal voice cried out with rage  
Throughout the reeking sky, while over all  
Flashed fitfully the cold, stern light of storms:—

"O trenchant fool! And if thou provest this  
What step hast thou advanced along the road  
To further peace? Thou hast no aim it seems,  
But to teach lessons in an art of eggs,  
Which, truth! thou teachest badly. Dost thou think  
To judge God by such standard as thou would'st  
Apply to beings finite? Get thee hence!  
And know that thy whole genius is one spark  
Blown from the shining suns which stud God's ring!  
Would'st thou with thy one spark put God to rights?"

Thus spake the Sea, and calming from its rage,  
Listened as some fresh soul cried out in doubt:—

"My soul is filled with doubt; I do not know  
How to tell right from wrong; I am confused!  
To all religions have I turned for help.

"Apart from creed, they tell me that I have  
A sense called 'Conscience,' which shall surely lead  
My soul apart from harm, do I but try  
To follow out its warnings through my life.

"Now this is strange to me; I have found men  
'Mong savage tribes who thought no wrong to slay,  
But rather counted it as doing good,  
Depending on some teaching of their creed.

"Yet, did I mention this, I soon was told  
That 'Conscience' lacked development in such—  
On some points 'twas developed; not on all;  
'Twas this accounted for their going wrong.

"On learning this, my mind (too logical)  
Grew much affrighted of this Conscience-sense;  
If through such lack the savage went astray,  
Then might not I? Who was to say I had  
Such sense developed fully? If not, then  
I might be daily erring in God's sight,  
Though Mankind—part developed—knew it not.

"And now, great Sea, can'st thou put me to rest?  
For I am so awearied with my doubts,  
And more in earnest than the World might think."

Thus spake the Sea in answer to the soul:—

"All knowledge is an ocean, and the drop  
Gained by your wisest minds is small indeed;  
For ye are bound by bonds too visible,

Which blind ye to the path for gaining more.

"Ye prate of right and wrong, and are but fools;  
Ye weep o'er things ye cannot understand,  
And miss broad wisdom cast on every side,  
Searching for that which never was nor is.

"A thousand years ye have done wrong in vain,  
And doing it ye hoped ye did some right:  
Reason in your religions had no place,  
Or if it had the place was out of sight.

"I know that to do right is hard enough;  
But harder far when there are different views,  
Holding that this is right, or that is wrong,  
Without the intervention of hard sense.

"They tell ye that to steal is wrong—and why?  
Because some ancient tablets said the same;  
Thus logic has small part in all their talk;  
'Tis logic that ye want to tell ye 'why.'

"If someone said to some:—"Tis wrong to breathe,'  
I wonder if that some would hold their breaths!  
Yet 'tis the logic of most holy creeds;  
I do not wonder that ye pant for sense.

"One stands upon a ladder, and he peers  
Owlwise at stars ten-billion leagues away;  
Looks down with scorn from his small altitude,  
And prates of things none at his feet can see!

"He talks of many things in a sage voice;  
But cannot see past death to where life leaps,  
Nor, on his drop of learning, sail beyond  
The bar of death, which holds this life at bay.

"The wise man with his ladder cannot pierce  
Death's mystery; nor anything but *guess*!  
In matters so obscure he cannot see  
One whit more deeply than his brothers do.

"This being so, we must depend on Sense,  
That strange and wondrous things, so common called,  
Possessed in *some* degree by every soul;  
But used so little that it might not *be*.

"Now turn your thoughts about awhile, and think,  
Perchance ye may find wisdom unawares;  
Ye want to know what's 'Right' and what is 'Wrong,'  
Methinks 'tis all the same as 'Good' and 'Harm.'

"For if ye work some 'Good' to any soul  
Ye may well claim to have done active 'Right';  
While if, on any, e'en small 'Harm' ye work  
'Tis just as certain you've done active 'Wrong.'

"But if no 'Harm' ye work in any wise  
Ye certainly have done no active 'Wrong,'  
Likewise, if guiltless ye of doing 'Good,'  
Ye cannot be appraised for working 'Right.'

"In later lives ye shall then bear the weight  
Of all the 'Harm' and 'Good' ye e'er have worked,  
And have ye done much active 'Good' or 'Harm'  
Your joys shall be the greater or the less.

"Likewise, if ye live free from active 'Good,'

Equally so from working any 'Harm,'  
Your bliss shall be not great, nor sorrow deep—  
I wish ye joy in life so negative!"

Thus ceased the Sea, and from the gloom about,  
There came a song sung in a sleepy voice,  
As though one sang while sleeping.

Thus it was:—

"There is no keen delight within that Place,  
But rather lang'rous joy,  
As though one looked across the World of Sleep  
And saw the dreamy face  
Of the great soul of Peace rise from the deep  
Where slumberous dreams are born,  
Far from the place where fears destroy,  
Far from the place where morn  
Is but a messenger of tears and pain  
Destroying slumber's reign."

The Sea was quiet a moment; then its voice,  
Soft with an undernote of sympathy,  
Came in a gentle song with promise filled:—

"Thou poor tired soul  
(Who sing'st in dreams)  
With utter toil dismayed,  
Comfort! *Thy* goal—  
The Deep of Rest—  
Is nearer than it seems,  
And there, though joy has been delayed,  
Thou shalt an aeon sleep,  
Waking, in dreams, to fuller zest  
Of peace in that vast Deep."

Some timid moments fled, while silence reigned;  
Then from the night above, a voice swept down,  
Filled in each tone with a poor soul's despair:—

"For all the years borne in the arms of Time  
Shall not this burden ease, nor comfort me;  
Shall not upraise me from this dire despair.  
No more the sky is blue—the sun shines not,  
And my whole prayer is but to be forgot,  
And in myself this dreariness forget  
In death, where all shall be as though 'twere not!"

Prompt was the Sea's reply:—

"Thou sorry soul,  
It seems to me thou art too full of grief  
To reason, or thou had'st not come to this.

"Doubtless, thou hast done wrong; yet is this life  
But one in many, and thou shalt have chance

To do some good, whereby thy harm shall be  
Somewhat more balanced, though not blotted out;  
For a done wrong dies never; 'twere as absurd  
Almost as thinking cause had no effect;  
Yet, likewise, good dies never; so thou shalt  
Lay up in this, for future lives, some store  
Of righteous deeds; for in the Last Life thou  
Shalt live eternally tremendous life  
In the great culmination of thy deeds,  
Both good and harmful; therefore do thy best  
Towards good deeds."

A moment's quiet there was;  
Then cried that poor remorseful one in doubt:—

"What are good deeds within the sight of God?  
No more than filthiest rags my mightiest good!  
How shall these save my soul from lasting woe?  
How with my evil shall my good compare?  
I cannot hope to win to peace through deeds  
That must, at best, sicken God's purity!"

No hesitation was there in reply:—

"Thou must not think God reasonless—He has  
Endowed thee with such powers as suit this state:  
Thy righteousness, to His, may truly be  
As filthy rags to a most glorious robe;  
But thou hast not God's strength, so trouble not,  
And do remember that He is most just,  
Expecting not of thee more than is meet;  
So shall thy deeds of good count unto thee,  
(Because of poor proficiency in right)  
Equal, in this life, to much greater good  
Worked in some future life of vaster power.

"Calm thee, dear soul! Now shake off thy remorse;  
Lose not one instant, but begin to live  
As thou would'st live were each succeeding day  
The last that thou would'st know. Be comforted  
In the hard work of doing good, spite of  
Thy cross-grained human nature, which rebels  
Against the will's authority, yet is  
So different when well curbed and drawn by love.

"Farewell awhile, O soul. I may meet thee  
In some far world, *working to happiness*,  
Ah! then how gladly shall my heart leap up!"

The Sea ceased from its speaking; and at last,  
My pent up feelings streamed abroad—I spoke:—

"O, Sea!  
Listening to thee,  
I learn!  
I go beneath time's crust!  
We tread near on the life which is to be.

Thy wisdom soothes my soul. Thy sense is just!  
Thou hast no talk of hells which ever burn;  
But that through many lives we are evolved  
By slow development (quick revolution slowed),  
Until all doubt, by preparation solved,  
Attain we to the Last Life—God's Abode."

The Sea was silent, and across the deeps  
A gentle voice came softly, and began:—

"Lately, within my sleep, of future times,  
Of the most future times this world shall know,  
My dreams have been.

"I saw thee, O thou Sea,  
'Mid the red loneliness of an evening's birth,  
Wrapped in the quietude of an aching still.

"Along thy shore I wandered, and my tears,  
Born of thy silence, welled but could not fall.

"I, who from out eternity had sped.  
Only to look upon thy face once more,  
Saw thy dead form; for with this world, wert thou  
Dead in the arms of Time, who once held me  
Likewise when dead, ere I passed yonder, where,  
Through a whole multitude of years, my dreams  
Only had been of thee.

"And then, O, Sea,  
E'en as I peered, through tears, across thy face,  
I saw a movement in thy depths, as though  
Thy life still stayed within thee; then afar  
I heard a sad, strange voice, despairingly  
Come wailing o'er thy wastes. And, O Great One!  
'Twas full awhile ere I perceived 'twas thou  
Whose dying voice sang o'er thy breathless plains,  
Joining the awful gloom, whose palpitance  
Of momentary blackness and anon of grey,  
Pulsed nights and wintry dawns o'er thy face.

"And this long-cold, forgotten world, whose bulk,  
Dying, but held thyself, its soul, O, Sea,  
Echoed the sad'ning cadence of thy song—  
The singing of thy dying voice, so that  
In the last days of this old world thy voice,  
Singing a song of agony 'mid gloom,  
Came backward through the years unto my soul,  
Pregnant with hopelessness and grief, until  
It seemed to me that all the tears of life  
Had spoken in thy song.

"That song, O, Sea,  
With its sad rhythm, is past human tongue  
To sing; so I but conjure up its sense,  
Though haltingly, and lacking all its power,  
And all the sad'ning terror and the woe  
Which trembled through its undertones, much as  
A dirge moans ever in the lower notes  
Of some cold, wintry gale o'er lonely shores:—

"The world is dying, and I am alone,  
In the deep silence, while the nearing sun  
Belches an awful flare of lurid fire  
Across the starkness of the dying world  
And far across my almost silenced breast.

"Done is my task of teaching life to men;  
No more the old emotions stir my soul;  
I am at peace, who ages was at war  
With the great elements of strife that rose  
And tortured me to fury in my youth.  
Stilled is my anger in the long gone days;  
Steeped is my heart in tears in its deep place;  
Gone are the souls who loved me in the past,  
And I am here alone—Oh! so alone!

"In a dim, far-off time, half-way between  
The loneliness of two eternities,  
I brood apart upon a dying world,  
And pray that I were something more, or less,  
Than what I am. For me there is no place  
Beyond this place!

"And now how I do feel  
The pulsing of my heart at lowest ebb.

"What is before me? Who can tell?—Not I!  
Perhaps 'tis better that I do not know.

"Even the mountains that upreared their crests  
Upon my boundaries, have died, and now  
They sleep upon the bosom of the world;  
And only my slow breathing on flat shores  
Tells that the pulse of life is with me yet.

"Now a great sense of cold oppresses me!  
I wonder if this be indeed the end;  
Nay, surely not; for God is great, and He  
Shall do no less for me than other souls;  
And yet, 'tis strange how doubt creeps in when death  
Draws nigh. 'Tis the great test. If faith survive,  
In some new life I shall not need to shame.  
"I will have faith, as I have always taught!  
And yet, methinks if God were brought to die  
He would have wondrous sympathy with me,  
As, doubtless, now He has.

"Ah! colder still!  
My God, who loved me in my youth and prime  
Be with me now in this supremest test!

"Haste thee now, Death!—'Tis such a natural fear!  
And yet, I know thou dost but shore the sea  
Of some tremendous life where holier thoughts  
May keep the mind at peace.... Ah! haste thee, Death!"

"Thus far I gat, and then a darkness came,  
And thou wast hidden, and I was awake."

Then ceased the voice, and in the furthest East  
Shone the dear light of dawn, that emblem of

The dawn that crowns death's night. And from the West  
There rose a sudden wind refreshingly,  
That filled the air with hope, and murmured low  
A message to the Sea from far beyond  
The sudden gate of death. And in the East  
The tender lights still grew.

And afar the world  
Reached up her sombre hills among the glow,  
Into the pure, ethereal waters of  
That sea of trembling hues which spumed and beat  
Softly upon the shore of night, and surged  
In beauteous sprays of foamy light above  
The gloomy cliffs that edge the dayless shore,  
And poured its living foam upon the world  
In cataracts of light. . . .

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[End of *The Voice of the Ocean* by William Hope Hodgson]