

Reflections

by Bhaktivinoda Thakur

Alas for those who spend their days
In festive mirth and joy:
The dazzling, deadly, liquid forms
Their hearts fore'er employ.

The shining bottles charm their eyes
And draw their heart's embrace;
The slaves of wine can never rise
From what we call disgrace.

Was man intended to be
A brute in work and heart?
Should man, the Lord of all around,
From common sense depart?

Man's glory is in common sense
Dictating us thy grace;
That man is made to live and love
The beauteous Heaven's embrace.

The flesh is not our own alas;
The mortal frame a chain;
The soul confined for former wrongs
Should try to rise again.

Why then this childish play in that
Which cannot be our own;
Which falls within a hundred years
As if a rose ablown.

Our life is but a rosy hue
To go ere long to naught;
The soul alone would last fore'er
With good or evil fraught.

How deep the thought of times to be!
How grave the aspect looks!
And wrapt in awe become, Oh, I
When reading Nature's books.

Man's life to him a problem dark
A screen both left and right;
No soul hath come to tell us what
Exists beyond our sight.

But then a voice, how deep and soft
Within ourselves is left;
Man! Man! Thou art immortal soul!
Thee Death can never melt.

For thee thy Sire on High has kept
A store of bliss above,
To end of time, thou art Oh! His
Who wants but purest love.

Oh Love! Thy power and spell benign
Now melt my soul to God;
How can my earthly words describe
That feeling soft and broad.

Enjoyment, sorrow, what but lots
To which the flesh is heir;
The soul that sleeps alone concludes
In them it hath a share.

And then, my friends, no more enjoy
Nor weep for all below;
The women, wine, and flesh of beasts
No love on thee bestow.

But thine to love thy brother man
And give thyself to God,
And God doth know your wages fair
This fact is true and broad.

Forget the past that sleeps and ne'er
The future dream at all;
But act in times that are with thee
And progress thee shall call.

But tell me not in reasoning cold,
The soul is made alone
By earth's mechanic lifeless rules
And to destruction prone.

My God who gave us life and all
Alone the soul can kill,
Or give it all the joys above
His promise to fulfill.

So push thy onward march, O soul.
Against an evil deed
That stands with soldiers Hate and Lust
A hero be indeed.

Maintain thy post in spirit world
As firmly as you can;
Let never matter push thee down
O stand heroic man!

O Saragrahi Vaishnava soul,
Thou art an angel fair;
Lead, lead me on to Vridaban
And spirit's power declare.

There rests my soul from matter free
Upon my Lover's arms
Eternal peace and spirits love
Are all my chanting charms.

This English poem 'Reflections' was written by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura in 1871. The poem was prefaced by the words, "Thoughts on popular topics or occasional notes by Baboo Kedar Nauth Dutta, Dy. Collector and Magistrate."