

The Daemon of the World eBook

The Daemon of the World by Percy Bysshe Shelley

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Page 1

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THE DAEMON OF THE WORLD.

A fragment.

PART 1.

Nec tantum prodere vati,
Quantum scire licet. Venit aetas omnis in unam
Congeriem, miserumque premunt tot saecula pectus.
Lucan, Phars. v. 176.

How wonderful is Death,
Death and his brother Sleep!
One pale as yonder wan and horned moon,



With lips of lurid blue,
The other glowing like the vital morn, 5
When throned on ocean's wave
It breathes over the world:
Yet both so passing strange and wonderful!

Hath then the iron-sceptred Skeleton,
Whose reign is in the tainted sepulchres, 10
To the hell dogs that couch beneath his throne
Cast that fair prey? Must that divinest form,
Which love and admiration cannot view
Without a beating heart, whose azure veins
Steal like dark streams along a field of snow, 15
Whose outline is as fair as marble clothed
In light of some sublimest mind, decay?
Nor putrefaction's breath
Leave aught of this pure spectacle
But loathsomeness and ruin?— 20
Spare aught but a dark theme,
On which the lightest heart might moralize?
Or is it but that downy-winged slumbers
Have charmed their nurse coy Silence near her lids
To watch their own repose? 25
Will they, when morning's beam
Flows through those wells of light,
Seek far from noise and day some western cave,
Where woods and streams with soft and pausing winds



Page 2

A lulling murmur weave ?— 30
lanthe doth not sleep
The dreamless sleep of death:
Nor in her moonlight chamber silently
Doth Henry hear her regular pulses throb,
Or mark her delicate cheek 35
With interchange of hues mock the broad moon,
Outwatching weary night,
Without assured reward.
Her dewy eyes are closed;
On their translucent lids, whose texture fine 40
Scarce hides the dark blue orbs that burn below
With unapparent fire,
The baby Sleep is pillowed:
Her golden tresses shade
The bosom's stainless pride, 45
Twining like tendrils of the parasite
Around a marble column.

Hark! whence that rushing sound?
'Tis like a wondrous strain that sweeps
Around a lonely ruin 50
When west winds sigh and evening waves respond
In whispers from the shore:
'Tis wilder than the unmeasured notes
Which from the unseen lyres of dells and groves
The genii of the breezes sweep. 55
Floating on waves of music and of light,
The chariot of the Daemon of the World
Descends in silent power:
Its shape reposed within: slight as some cloud
That catches but the palest tinge of day 60
When evening yields to night,
Bright as that fibrous woof when stars indue
Its transitory robe.
Four shapeless shadows bright and beautiful
Draw that strange car of glory, reins of light 65
Check their unearthly speed; they stop and fold
Their wings of braided air:
The Daemon leaning from the ethereal car



Gazed on the slumbering maid.
Human eye hath ne'er beheld 70
A shape so wild, so bright, so beautiful,
As that which o'er the maiden's charmed sleep
Waving a starry wand,
Hung like a mist of light.
Such sounds as breathed around like odorous winds 75
Of wakening spring arose,
Filling the chamber and the moonlight sky.
Maiden, the world's supremest spirit
Beneath the shadow of her wings
Folds all thy memory doth inherit 80
From ruin of divinest things,
Feelings that lure thee to betray,
And light of thoughts that pass away.
For thou hast earned a mighty boon,
The truths which wisest poets see 85
Dimly, thy mind may make its own,
Rewarding its own majesty,
Entranced in some diviner mood
Of self-oblivious solitude.

Custom, and Faith, and Power thou spurnest; 90
From hate and awe thy heart is free;
Ardent and pure as day thou burnest,
For dark and cold mortality
A living light, to cheer it long,
The watch-fires of the world among. 95



Page 3

Therefore from nature's inner shrine,
Where gods and fiends in worship bend,
Majestic spirit, be it thine
The flame to seize, the veil to rend,
Where the vast snake Eternity 100
In charmed sleep doth ever lie.

All that inspires thy voice of love,
Or speaks in thy unclosing eyes,
Or through thy frame doth burn or move,
Or think or feel, awake, arise! 105
Spirit, leave for mine and me
Earth's unsubstantial mimicry!

It ceased, and from the mute and moveless frame
A radiant spirit arose,
All beautiful in naked purity. 110
Robed in its human hues it did ascend,
Disparting as it went the silver clouds,
It moved towards the car, and took its seat
Beside the Daemon shape.

Obedient to the sweep of aery song, 115
The mighty ministers
Unfurled their prismatic wings.
The magic car moved on;
The night was fair, innumerable stars
Studded heaven's dark blue vault; 120
The eastern wave grew pale
With the first smile of morn.
The magic car moved on.
From the swift sweep of wings
The atmosphere in flaming sparkles flew; 125
And where the burning wheels
Eddied above the mountain's loftiest peak
Was traced a line of lightning.
Now far above a rock the utmost verge
Of the wide earth it flew, 130
The rival of the Andes, whose dark brow
Frowned o'er the silver sea.
Far, far below the chariot's stormy path,
Calm as a slumbering babe,
Tremendous ocean lay. 135
Its broad and silent mirror gave to view



The pale and waning stars,
The chariot's fiery track,
And the grey light of morn
Tingeing those fleecy clouds 140
That cradled in their folds the infant dawn.
The chariot seemed to fly
Through the abyss of an immense concave,
Radiant with million constellations, tinged
With shades of infinite colour, 145
And semicircled with a belt
Flashing incessant meteors.

As they approached their goal,
The winged shadows seemed to gather speed.
The sea no longer was distinguished; earth 150
Appeared a vast and shadowy sphere, suspended
In the black concave of heaven
With the sun's cloudless orb,
Whose rays of rapid light
Parted around the chariot's swifter course, 155
And fell like ocean's feathery spray
Dashed from the boiling surge
Before a vessel's prow.



Page 4

The magic car moved on.
Earth's distant orb appeared 160
The smallest light that twinkles in the heavens,
Whilst round the chariot's way
Innumerable systems widely rolled,
And countless spheres diffused
An ever varying glory. 165
It was a sight of wonder! Some were horned,
And like the moon's argentine crescent hung
In the dark dome of heaven; some did shed
A clear mild beam like Hesperus, while the sea
Yet glows with fading sunlight; others dashed 170
Athwart the night with trains of bickering fire,
Like sphered worlds to death and ruin driven;
Some shone like stars, and as the chariot passed
Bedimmed all other light.

Spirit of Nature! here 175
In this interminable wilderness
Of worlds, at whose involved immensity
Even soaring fancy staggers,
Here is thy fitting temple.
Yet not the lightest leaf 180
That quivers to the passing breeze
Is less instinct with thee,-
Yet not the meanest worm.
That lurks in graves and fattens on the dead,
Less shares thy eternal breath. 185
Spirit of Nature! thou
Imperishable as this glorious scene,
Here is thy fitting temple.

If solitude hath ever led thy steps
To the shore of the immeasurable sea, 190
And thou hast lingered there
Until the sun's broad orb
Seemed resting on the fiery line of ocean,
Thou must have marked the braided webs of gold
That without motion hang 195
Over the sinking sphere:
Thou must have marked the billowy mountain clouds,
Edged with intolerable radiancy,
Towering like rocks of jet
Above the burning deep: 200



And yet there is a moment
When the sun's highest point
Peers like a star o'er ocean's western edge,
When those far clouds of feathery purple gleam
Like fairy lands girt by some heavenly sea: 205
Then has thy rapt imagination soared
Where in the midst of all existing things
The temple of the mightiest Daemon stands.

Yet not the golden islands
That gleam amid yon flood of purple light, 210
Nor the feathery curtains
That canopy the sun's resplendent couch,
Nor the burnished ocean waves
Paving that gorgeous dome,
So fair, so wonderful a sight 215
As the eternal temple could afford.
The elements of all that human thought
Can frame of lovely or sublime, did join
To rear the fabric of the fane, nor aught
Of earth may image forth its majesty. 220
Yet likest evening's vault that faery hall,
As heaven low resting on the wave it spread
Its floors of flashing light,
Its vast and azure dome;
And on the verge of that obscure abyss 225
Where crystal battlements o'erhang the gulf
Of the dark world, ten thousand spheres diffuse
Their lustre through its adamantine gates.



Page 5

The magic car no longer moved;
The Daemon and the Spirit 230
Entered the eternal gates.
Those clouds of aery gold
That slept in glittering billows
Beneath the azure canopy,
With the ethereal footsteps trembled not; 235
While slight and odorous mists
Floated to strains of thrilling melody
Through the vast columns and the pearly shrines.

The Daemon and the Spirit
Approached the overhanging battlement, 240
Below lay stretched the boundless universe!
There, far as the remotest line
That limits swift imagination's flight.
Unending orbs mingled in mazy motion,
Immutably fulfilling 245
Eternal Nature's law.
Above, below, around,
The circling systems formed
A wilderness of harmony.
Each with undeviating aim 250
In eloquent silence through the depths of space
Pursued its wondrous way.—

Awhile the Spirit paused in ecstasy.
Yet soon she saw, as the vast spheres swept by,
Strange things within their belted orbs appear. 255
Like animated frenzies, dimly moved
Shadows, and skeletons, and fiendly shapes,
Thronging round human graves, and o'er the dead
Sculpturing records for each memory
In verse, such as malignant gods pronounce, 260
Blasting the hopes of men, when heaven and hell
Confounded burst in ruin o'er the world:
And they did build vast trophies, instruments
Of murder, human bones, barbaric gold,
Skins torn from living men, and towers of skulls 265
With sightless holes gazing on blinder heaven,
Mitres, and crowns, and brazen chariots stained
With blood, and scrolls of mystic wickedness,
The sanguine codes of venerable crime.
The likeness of a throned king came by. 270



When these had passed, bearing upon his brow
A threefold crown; his countenance was calm.
His eye severe and cold; but his right hand
Was charged with bloody coin, and he did gnaw
By fits, with secret smiles, a human heart 275
Concealed beneath his robe; and motley shapes,
A multitudinous throng, around him knelt.
With bosoms bare, and bowed heads, and false looks
Of true submission, as the sphere rolled by.
Brooking no eye to witness their foul shame, 280
Which human hearts must feel, while human tongues
Tremble to speak, they did rage horribly,
Breathing in self-contempt fierce blasphemies
Against the Daemon of the World, and high
Hurling their armed hands where the pure Spirit, 285
Serene and inaccessibly secure,
Stood on an isolated pinnacle.
The flood of ages combating below,
The depth of the unbounded universe
Above, and all around 290
Necessity's unchanging harmony.



Page 6

PART 2.

O happy Earth! reality of Heaven!
To which those restless powers that ceaselessly
Throng through the human universe aspire;
Thou consummation of all mortal hope! 295
Thou glorious prize of blindly-working will!
Whose rays, diffused throughout all space and time,
Verge to one point and blend for ever there:
Of purest spirits thou pure dwelling-place!
Where care and sorrow, impotence and crime, 300
Languor, disease, and ignorance dare not come:
O happy Earth, reality of Heaven!

Genius has seen thee in her passionate dreams,
And dim forebodings of thy loveliness,
Haunting the human heart, have there entwined 305
Those rooted hopes, that the proud Power of Evil
Shall not for ever on this fairest world
Shake pestilence and war, or that his slaves
With blasphemy for prayer, and human blood
For sacrifice, before his shrine for ever 310
In adoration bend, or Erebus
With all its banded fiends shall not uprising
To overwhelm in envy and revenge
The dauntless and the good, who dare to hurl
Defiance at his throne, girt tho' it be 315
With Death's omnipotence. Thou hast beheld
His empire, o'er the present and the past;
It was a desolate sight—now gaze on mine,
Futurity. Thou hoary giant Time,
Render thou up thy half-devoured babes,— 320
And from the cradles of eternity,
Where millions lie lulled to their portioned sleep
By the deep murmuring stream of passing things,
Tear thou that gloomy shroud.—Spirit, behold
Thy glorious destiny!
The Spirit saw 325
The vast frame of the renovated world
Smile in the lap of Chaos, and the sense
Of hope thro' her fine texture did suffuse
Such varying glow, as summer evening casts
On undulating clouds and deepening lakes. 330



Like the vague sighings of a wind at even,
That wakes the wavelets of the slumbering sea
And dies on the creation of its breath,
And sinks and rises, fails and swells by fits,
Was the sweet stream of thought that with wild motion 335
Flowed o'er the Spirit's human sympathies.
The mighty tide of thought had paused awhile,
Which from the Daemon now like Ocean's stream
Again began to pour.—

To me is given

The wonders of the human world to keep- 340
Space, matter, time and mind—let the sight
Renew and strengthen all thy failing hope.
All things are recreated, and the flame
Of consentaneous love inspires all life:
The fertile bosom of the earth gives suck 345
To myriads, who still grow beneath her care,
Rewarding her with their pure perfectness:
The balmy breathings of the wind inhale



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Her virtues, and diffuse them all abroad:
Health floats amid the gentle atmosphere, 350
Glow in the fruits, and mantles on the stream;
No storms deform the beaming brow of heaven,
Nor scatter in the freshness of its pride
The foliage of the undecaying trees;
But fruits are ever ripe, flowers ever fair, 355
And Autumn proudly bears her matron grace,
Kindling a flush on the fair cheek of Spring,
Whose virgin bloom beneath the ruddy fruit
Reflects its tint and blushes into love.

The habitable earth is full of bliss; 360
Those wastes of frozen billows that were hurled
By everlasting snow-storms round the poles,
Where matter dared not vegetate nor live,
But ceaseless frost round the vast solitude
Bound its broad zone of stillness, are unloosed; 365
And fragrant zephyrs there from spicy isles
Ruffle the placid ocean-deep, that rolls
Its broad, bright surges to the sloping sand,
Whose roar is wakened into echoings sweet
To murmur through the heaven-breathing groves 370
And melodise with man's blest nature there.

The vast tract of the parched and sandy waste
Now teems with countless rills and shady woods,
Corn-fields and pastures and white cottages;
And where the startled wilderness did hear 375
A savage conqueror stained in kindred blood,
Hymning his victory, or the milder snake
Crushing the bones of some frail antelope
Within his brazen folds—the dewy lawn,
Offering sweet incense to the sunrise, smiles 380
To see a babe before his mother's door,
Share with the green and golden basilisk
That comes to lick his feet, his morning's meal.

Those trackless deeps, where many a weary sail
Has seen, above the illimitable plain, 385



Morning on night and night on morning rise,
Whilst still no land to greet the wanderer spread
Its shadowy mountains on the sunbright sea,
Where the loud roarings of the tempest-waves
So long have mingled with the gusty wind 390
In melancholy loneliness, and swept
The desert of those ocean solitudes,
But vocal to the sea-bird's harrowing shriek,
The bellowing monster, and the rushing storm,
Now to the sweet and many-mingling sounds 395
Of kindest human impulses respond:
Those lonely realms bright garden-isles begem,
With lightsome clouds and shining seas between,
And fertile valleys resonant with bliss,
Whilst green woods overcanopy the wave, 400
Which like a toil-worn labourer leaps to shore,
To meet the kisses of the flowerets there.



Page 8

Man chief perceives the change, his being notes
The gradual renovation, and defines
Each movement of its progress on his mind. 405
Man, where the gloom of the long polar night
Lowered o'er the snow-clad rocks and frozen soil,
Where scarce the hardiest herb that braves the frost
Basked in the moonlight's ineffectual glow,
Shrank with the plants, and darkened with the night; 410
Nor where the tropics bound the realms of day
With a broad belt of mingling cloud and flame,
Where blue mists through the unmoving atmosphere
Scattered the seeds of pestilence, and fed
Unnatural vegetation, where the land 415
Teemed with all earthquake, tempest and disease,
Was man a nobler being; slavery
Had crushed him to his country's blood-stained dust.

Even where the milder zone afforded man
A seeming shelter, yet contagion there, 420
Blighting his being with unnumbered ills,
Spread like a quenchless fire; nor truth availed
Till late to arrest its progress, or create
That peace which first in bloodless victory waved
Her snowy standard o'er this favoured clime: 425
There man was long the train-bearer of slaves,
The mimic of surrounding misery,
The jackal of ambition's lion-rage,
The bloodhound of religion's hungry zeal.

Here now the human being stands adorning 430
This loveliest earth with taintless body and mind;
Blest from his birth with all bland impulses,
Which gently in his noble bosom wake
All kindly passions and all pure desires.
Him, still from hope to hope the bliss pursuing, 435
Which from the exhaustless lore of human weal
Dawns on the virtuous mind, the thoughts that rise
In time-destroying infiniteness gift
With self-enshrined eternity, that mocks
The unprevailing hoariness of age, 440
And man, once fleeting o'er the transient scene
Swift as an unremembered vision, stands
Immortal upon earth: no longer now
He slays the beast that sports around his dwelling



And horribly devours its mangled flesh, 445
Or drinks its vital blood, which like a stream
Of poison thro' his fevered veins did flow
Feeding a plague that secretly consumed
His feeble frame, and kindling in his mind
Hatred, despair, and fear and vain belief, 450
The germs of misery, death, disease and crime.
No longer now the winged habitants,
That in the woods their sweet lives sing away,
Flee from the form of man; but gather round,
And prune their sunny feathers on the hands 455
Which little children stretch in friendly sport
Towards these dreadless partners of their play.
All things are void of terror: man has lost
His desolating privilege, and stands
An equal amidst equals: happiness



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460

And science dawn though late upon the earth;
Peace cheers the mind, health renovates the frame;
Disease and pleasure cease to mingle here,
Reason and passion cease to combat there;
Whilst mind unfettered o'er the earth extends 465
Its all-subduing energies, and wields
The sceptre of a vast dominion there.

Mild is the slow necessity of death:
The tranquil spirit fails beneath its grasp,
Without a groan, almost without a fear, 470
Resigned in peace to the necessity,
Calm as a voyager to some distant land,
And full of wonder, full of hope as he.
The deadly germs of languor and disease
Waste in the human frame, and Nature gifts 475
With choicest boons her human worshippers.
How vigorous now the athletic form of age!
How clear its open and unwrinkled brow!
Where neither avarice, cunning, pride, or care,
Had stamped the seal of grey deformity 480
On all the mingling lineaments of time.
How lovely the intrepid front of youth!
How sweet the smiles of taintless infancy.

Within the massy prison's mouldering courts,
Fearless and free the ruddy children play, 485
Weaving gay chaplets for their innocent brows
With the green ivy and the red wall-flower,
That mock the dungeon's unavailing gloom;
The ponderous chains, and gratings of strong iron,
There rust amid the accumulated ruins 490
Now mingling slowly with their native earth:
There the broad beam of day, which feebly once
Lighted the cheek of lean captivity
With a pale and sickly glare, now freely shines
On the pure smiles of infant playfulness: 495
No more the shuddering voice of hoarse despair
Peals through the echoing vaults, but soothing notes
Of ivy-fingered winds and gladsome birds
And merriment are resonant around.



The fanes of Fear and Falsehood hear no more 500
The voice that once waked multitudes to war
Thundering thro' all their aisles: but now respond
To the death dirge of the melancholy wind:
It were a sight of awfulness to see
The works of faith and slavery, so vast, 505
So sumptuous, yet withal so perishing!
Even as the corpse that rests beneath their wall.
A thousand mourners deck the pomp of death
To-day, the breathing marble glows above
To decorate its memory, and tongues 510
Are busy of its life: to-morrow, worms
In silence and in darkness seize their prey.
These ruins soon leave not a wreck behind:
Their elements, wide-scattered o'er the globe,
To happier shapes are moulded, and become 515
Ministrant to all blissful impulses:
Thus human things are perfected, and earth,
Even as a child beneath its mother's love,
Is strengthened in all excellence, and grows
Fairer and nobler with each passing year. 520



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Now Time his dusky pennons o'er the scene
Closes in steadfast darkness, and the past
Fades from our charmed sight. My task is done:
Thy lore is learned. Earth's wonders are thine own,
With all the fear and all the hope they bring. 525
My spells are past: the present now recurs.
Ah me! a pathless wilderness remains
Yet unsubdued by man's reclaiming hand.

Yet, human Spirit, bravely hold thy course,
Let virtue teach thee firmly to pursue 530
The gradual paths of an aspiring change:
For birth and life and death, and that strange state
Before the naked powers that thro' the world
Wander like winds have found a human home,
All tend to perfect happiness, and urge 535
The restless wheels of being on their way,
Whose flashing spokes, instinct with infinite life,
Bicker and burn to gain their destined goal:
For birth but wakes the universal mind
Whose mighty streams might else in silence flow 540
Thro' the vast world, to individual sense
Of outward shows, whose unexperienced shape
New modes of passion to its frame may lend;
Life is its state of action, and the store
Of all events is aggregated there 545
That variegate the eternal universe;
Death is a gate of dreariness and gloom,
That leads to azure isles and beaming skies
And happy regions of eternal hope.
Therefore, O Spirit! fearlessly bear on: 550
Though storms may break the primrose on its stalk,
Though frosts may blight the freshness of its bloom,
Yet spring's awakening breath will woo the earth,
To feed with kindest dews its favourite flower,
That blooms in mossy banks and darksome glens, 555
Lighting the green wood with its sunny smile.

Fear not then, Spirit, death's disrobing hand,
So welcome when the tyrant is awake,
So welcome when the bigot's hell-torch flares;
'Tis but the voyage of a darksome hour, 560
The transient gulf-dream of a startling sleep.
For what thou art shall perish utterly,



But what is thine may never cease to be;
Death is no foe to virtue: earth has seen
Love's brightest roses on the scaffold bloom, 565
Mingling with freedom's fadeless laurels there,
And presaging the truth of visioned bliss.
Are there not hopes within thee, which this scene
Of linked and gradual being has confirmed?
Hopes that not vainly thou, and living fires 570
Of mind as radiant and as pure as thou,
Have shone upon the paths of men—return,
Surpassing Spirit, to that world, where thou
Art destined an eternal war to wage
With tyranny and falsehood, and uproot 575
The germs of misery from the human heart.
Thine is the hand whose piety would soothe
The thorny pillow of unhappy crime,



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Whose impotence an easy pardon gains,
Watching its wanderings as a friend's disease: 580
Thine is the brow whose mildness would defy
Its fiercest rage, and brave its sternest will,
When fenced by power and master of the world.
Thou art sincere and good; of resolute mind,
Free from heart-withering custom's cold control, 585
Of passion lofty, pure and unsubdued.
Earth's pride and meanness could not vanquish thee,
And therefore art thou worthy of the boon
Which thou hast now received: virtue shall keep
Thy footsteps in the path that thou hast trod, 590
And many days of beaming hope shall bless
Thy spotless life of sweet and sacred love.
Go, happy one, and give that bosom joy
Whose sleepless spirit waits to catch
Light, life and rapture from thy smile. 595

The Daemon called its winged ministers.
Speechless with bliss the Spirit mounts the car,
That rolled beside the crystal battlement,
Bending her beamy eyes in thankfulness.
The burning wheels inflame 600
The steep descent of Heaven's untrodden way.
Fast and far the chariot flew:
The mighty globes that rolled
Around the gate of the Eternal Fane
Lessened by slow degrees, and soon appeared 605
Such tiny twinklers as the planet orbs
That ministering on the solar power
With borrowed light pursued their narrower way.
Earth floated then below:
The chariot paused a moment; 610
The Spirit then descended:
And from the earth departing
The shadows with swift wings
Speeded like thought upon the light of Heaven.

The Body and the Soul united then, 615
A gentle start convulsed lanthe's frame:



Her veiny eyelids quietly unclosed;
Moveless awhile the dark blue orbs remained:
She looked around in wonder and beheld
Henry, who kneeled in silence by her couch, 620
Watching her sleep with looks of speechless love,
And the bright beaming stars
That through the casement shone.

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