

A Mystery

By Ambrose Bierce

A thing to be thought with abated breath,
And named with Tears:
There ever shall be as there ever have been,
Beyond our ken,
The weight of the Past with its burden of sin,
A shadow thrown from the Future within,
On the souls of men.
And the weight unfelt and the shadow unseen,
With the cry of the Present unheard between,
Is all of life.
And 'tis only through toil and the nameless pain
Of wishes forever unwished again,
By an aimless strife,—
As who should do battle with weapon of steel
To the fleshless Dark which he cannot feel,
As it hedges him round—
That peace is found.
Thinkest thou that “to smile” is the same as “to live,”
That a life shall receive what it need not give,
That toil is toil;
That a fruitful future unmoistened by tears
Brings harvest of ears,
And wine and oil?
O, Dreamer of Dreams, there forever shall be
A blossomless growth in the spirit of thee
Still draping in gloom
Each fairy façade of each castle so fair,
By thy fancy upreared in the roseate air,
As ivy a tomb,
'Tis rooted in life and its fruit is of death,
And the poisoned breath,
In its baleful shadow, still shudders and moans
In voiceless tones.
Wouldst thou know, O mortal, the secret of Pain?
'Tis the payment in blood for each wish we obtain.