

When Idols Fall

By George Sylvester Viereck

Foul night-birds brood in fearsome throng
About the path that I must tread:
Thou art not what I thought thee long,
And oh, I would that I were dead!
Less bitter was the gall they ran
To offer Christ upon the tree,
Or the salt tears He shed for man,
Deserted in Gethsemane.

For thou wast all the god I had
While months on months were born and died,
Thy lips' sweet fragrance made me glad
As holy bells at eventide.
Aye, for thy sake, my god on earth,
I joyed to suffer all I could,
And counted as of lesser worth
The chalice of the Saviour's blood!

Entranced I knelt before thy shrine
And filled love's chalice, I thy priest;
With flowers as crimson as the wine
I decked our altar for the feast.
I gave thee more than love may give,
First-fruits of song, truth, honour—all!
Too much I loved thee: I must live
To see God's awful justice fall.

I bleed beneath a wound the years
That heal all sorrow shall not heal;
O barren waste, O fruitless tears!
I gave thee mine eternal weal.
My idol crumbled in the dust
(Ah, that I lived that day to see!)
There came a sudden piercing thrust,
And all my life was dead in me!

Thou spak'st a single hideous word,
And that one word became the knoll
Of all that made life dear, and blurred
The lines of good within my soul.
Better the plague-spots ringed me round,

The hangman gave the fatal sign,
Than that such monstrous word should sound
From lips that once I held divine!

A veil of darkness hid the sun,
Night fell, and stars from heaven were hurled,
For when this fearful thing was done,
It spelt the ruin of a world.
The string whose music won my bays
Snapped with a blinding thrill of pain;
Through all the everlasting days
I shall not hear its note again.

Amidst the gloom I grope for song;
The fires die out that passion fed:
Thou art not what I thought thee long,
And oh! I would that I were dead!
Yet worse than all the pain of loss,
The smile that seals a traitor's will,
Is this: that knowing gold for dross,
I cannot choose but love thee still!