

# **HYMNS TO NIGHT.**

Adelbert Chamisso

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*(Translated from the German of Novalis.)*

## I.

Who that has life and intelligence, loves not, before all the surrounding miracles of space, ever-joyous light with its tints, its beams, and its waves, its mild omnipresence, when it comes as the waking day. Like the inmost soul of life, it is inhaled by the giant universe of gleaming stars, that dance as they swim in its blue flood; it is inhaled by the glittering, eternally motionless stone, by the living plant that drinks it in, by the wild and impetuous beast in its many forms; but above all, by the glorious stranger, with eyes of intellect, majestic step, with lips melodious, and gently closed. As a king over earthly nature, it calls forth to countless changes every power, binds and loosens bonds unnumbered, and hangs around every earthly being its heavenly picture. Alone its presence declares the wondrous glory of the kingdoms the world.

I turn aside to the holy, the inexpressible, the mysterious Night. Afar off lies the world, buried in some deep chasm: desolate and lonely is the spot it filled. Through the chords of the breast sighs deepest sorrow. I will sink down into the dewdrops, and with ashes will I be commingled. The distant lines of memory, desires of youth, the dreams of childhood, a whole life's short joys and hopes vain, unfulfilled, come clothed in grey, like evening mists, when the sun's glory has departed. Elsewhere has the light broken upon habitations of gladness. What, should it never return again to its children, who with the faith of innocence await its coming?

What fount is thus suddenly opened within the heart, so full of forethought, that destroys the soft breath of sorrow? Thou also dost thou love us, gloomy Night? What holdest thou concealed beneath thy mantle that draws my soul towards thee with such mysterious power? Costly balsam raineth from thy hand; from thy horn pourest thou out manna; the heavy wings of the spirit liftest thou. Darkly and inexpressibly do we feel ourselves moved: a solemn countenance I behold with glad alarm, that bends towards me in gentle contemplation, displaying, among endless allurements of the mother, lovely youth! How poor and childish does the light now seem! How joyous and how hallowed is the day's departure! Therefore then only, because Night dismissed thy vassals, hast thou sown in the infinity of space those shining balls to declare thine almighty power, and thy return in the season of absence? More heavenly than those glittering stars seem the unnumbered eyes that Night has opened within us. Farther can they see than beyond the palest of that countless host; without need of light can

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they pierce the depths of a spirit of love, that fills a yet more glorious space with joy beyond expression. Glory to the world's Queen, the high declarer of spheres of holiness, the nurse of hallowed love! Thee, thou tenderly beloved one, doth she send to me thee, lovely sun of the Night. Now I awaken, for I am thine and mine: the Night hast thou given as a sign of life, and made me man. Devour with glowing spiritual fire this earthly body, that I ethereal may abide with thee in union yet more perfect, and then may the bridal Night endure for ever.

### II.

Must ever the morn return? Is there no end to the sovereignty of earth? Unhallowed occupation breaks the heavenly pinion of the Night. Shall the secret offering of love at no time burn for ever? To the Light is its period allotted; but beyond time and space is the empire of the Night. Eternal is the duration of sleep. Thou holy sleep! bless not too rarely the Night's dedicated son in this earth's daily work! Fools alone recognise thee not, and know of no sleep beyond the shadow which in that twilight of the actual Night thou throwest in compassion over us. They feel thee not in the vine's golden flood, in the almond-tree's marvel oil, and in the brown juice of the manna; they know not that it is thou that enhaloest the tender maiden's breast, and makest a heaven of her bosom; conceive not that out of histories of old thou steppest forth an opener of heaven, and bearest the key to the abodes of the blessed, the silent messenger of unending mysteries.

### III.

Once, when I was shedding bitter tears, when my hope streamed away dissolved in sorrow, and I stood alone beside the barren hill, that concealed in narrow gloomy space the form of my existence alone, as never solitary yet hath been, urged by an agony beyond expression, powerless, no more than a mere thought of sorrow; as I looked around me there for aid, could not advance, could not retire, and hung with incessant longing upon fleeting, failing life; then came there from the blue distance, from the heights of my former happiness, a thin veil of the twilight gloom, and in a moment burst the bondage of the fetters of the birth of light. Then fled the glories of the earth, and all my sorrow with them; sadness melted away in a new, an unfathomable world; thou, inspiration of the Night, slumber of heaven, camest over me; the spot whereon I stood rose insensibly on high; above the spot soared forth my released and new-born spirit. The hill became a cloud of dust; through the cloud I beheld the revealed features of my beloved one. In her eyes eternity reposed; I grasped her hands, and my tears formed a glittering, inseparable bond. Ages were swept by like storms into the distance; on her neck I wept tears of ecstasy for life renewed. It was my first, my only dream; and from that time I feel an eternal and unchanging faith in the heaven of the Night, and in its light, the Loved One.

### IV.

Now do I know when the last morn will be; when the light shall no more give alarm to the night and to love; when the slumber shall be without end, and there shall be but one exhaustless dream. Heavenly weariness do I feel within me. Long and wearisome had become the pilgrimage to the holy grave the cross a burthen. He who hath tasted of the crystal wave that gushes forth, unknown to common eye, in the dark bosom of that hill, against whose foot the flood of earthly waves is dashed and broken; he who hath stood upon the summit of the world's mountain bounds, and hath looked beyond them down into that new land, into the abode of Night; he, well I ween, turns not back into the turmoil of the world into the land where the light, and eternal unrest, dwells.

There, above, does he erect his huts his huts of peace; there longs and loves, until comes the most welcome of all hours to draw him down into that fountain's source. Upon the surface floats all that is earthly it is hurried back by storms; but that which was hallowed by the breath of love, freely streams it forth, through hidden paths, into

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that realm beyond the mountain chain, and there, exhaled as incense, becomes mixed with loves that have slept. Still, cheerful light, dost thou waken the weary to his toil, still pourest thou glad life into my breast; but from the mossy monument that memory has raised, thence canst thou not allure me. Willingly will I employ my hands in industry and toil; I will look around me at thy bidding; I will celebrate the full glory of thy splendour; trace out, untired, the beauteous consistency of thy wondrous work; willingly will I mark the marvellous course of thy mighty, glowing timepiece; observe the balance of gigantic powers, and the laws of the wondrous play of countless spaces and their periods. But true to the Night remains my heart of hearts, and to creative Love, her daughter. Canst thou show me a heart for ever faithful? Hath thy sun fond eyes that know me? Do thy stars clasp my proffered hand? Do they return the tender pressure, the caressing word? Hast thou clothed her with fair hues and pleasing outline? Or was it she who gave thine ornament a higher, dearer meaning? What pleasure, what enjoyment, can thy life afford, that shall outweigh the ecstasies of death? Bears not everything that inspires us the colours of the Night? Thee she cherishes with a mother's care; to her thou owest all thy majesty. Thou hadst melted in thyself, hadst been dissolved in endless space, had she not restrained and encircled thee, so that thou wert warm, and gavest life to the world. Verily I was, before thou wert: the mother sent me with my sisters to inhabit thy world, to hallow it with love, so that it might be gazed on as a memorial for ever, to plant it with unfading flowers. As yet they have borne no fruit, these godlike thoughts; but few as yet are the traces of our revelation. The day shall come when thy timepiece pointeth to the end of time, when thou shalt be even as one of us; and, filled with longing and ardent love, be blotted out and die. Within my soul I feel the end of thy distracted power, heavenly freedom, hailed return. In wild sorrow I recognise thy distance from our home, thy hostility towards the ancient glorious heaven. In vain are thy tumult and thy rage. Indestructible remains the cross a victorious banner of our race.

"I wander over,  
And every tear  
To gem our pleasure  
Will then appear.  
A few more hours,  
And I find my rest  
In maddening bliss,  
On the loved one's breast.  
Life, never ending,  
Swells mighty in me;  
I look from above down  
Look back upon thee.  
By yonder hillock  
Expires thy beam;  
And comes with a shadow,  
The cooling gleam.  
Oh, call me, thou loved one,  
With strength from above;  
That I may slumber,  
And wake to love.  
I welcome death's  
Reviving flood;  
To balm and to ether  
It changes my blood.  
I live through each day,  
Filled with faith and desire;  
And die when the Night comes  
In heaven-born fire."

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### V.

Over the widely-spreading races of mankind, ruled aforesaid an iron Destiny with silent power. A dark and heavy band was around man's anxious soul; without end was the earth; the home of the gods and their abode. Throughout eternities had her mysterious structure stood. Beyond the red mountains of the morning, in the holy bosom of the sea, there dwelt the Sun, the all-inflaming, living light. A hoary giant bare the sacred world. Securely prisoned, beneath mountains, lay the first sons of the mother Earth, powerless in their destructive fury against the new and glorious race of the gods, and their kindred, joyous men. The dark, green ocean's depth was the bosom of a goddess. In the crystal grottoes rioted a voluptuous tribe. Rivers, trees, flowers, and brute beasts had human understanding. Sweeter was the wine poured forth by youth's soft bloom; a god in the vine's clusters; a loving, a maternal goddess, shooting forth among the full, golden sheaves; love's holy flame, a delicious service to the most beautiful of the goddesses. An ever gay and joyous festival of heaven's children and the dwellers upon earth, life rustled on as a spring, through centuries. All races venerated, like children, the tender, thousand-fold flame, as the highest of the world; one thought only was there, one hideous vision of a dream:—

"That fearful to the joyous tables came,  
And the gay soul in wild distraction shrouded.  
Here could the gods themselves no counsel frame,  
That might console the breast with sorrow clouded.  
This monster's path mysterious, still the same,  
Unstilled his rage, though prayers on gifts were crowded.  
His name was Death, who with distress of soul,  
Anguish and tears, on the hour of pleasure stole.

For ever now from everything departed  
That here can swell the heart with sweet delight,  
Torn now from the beloved one, who, sad-hearted,  
On earth could but desire and grief excite,  
A feeble dream seemed to the dead imparted,  
Powerless striving made man's only right;  
And broken was enjoyment's heaving billow,  
Upon the rock of endless care, its pillow.

With daring mind, as heavenly fancy glows,  
Man masks the fearful shape with fair resembling:  
His torch put out, a mild youth doth repose;  
Soft is the end as the lyre's mournful trembling.  
Remembrance fades i' the gloom a shadow throws:  
So sang the song, a dreadful doom dissembling.  
Yet undefined remained eternal Night,  
The stern reminder of some distant might."

At length the old world bowed its head. The gay gardens of the young race were withered; beyond into the freer, desert space aspired less childish and maturing man. The gods then vanished with their train. Lonely and lifeless, Nature stood. The scanty number and the rigid measure bound her with fetters of iron. As into dust and air melted the inconceivable blossoms of life into mysterious words. Fled was the magic faith, and phantasy the all-changing, all-uniting friend from heaven. Over the rigid earth, unfriendly, blew a cold north wind, and the

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wonder—home, now without life, was lost in ether; the recesses of the heavens were filled with beaming worlds. Into a holier sphere, into the mind's far higher space, did the world draw the soul with its powers, there to wander until the break of the world's dawning glory. No longer was the light the gods' abode, their token in the heavens: the veil of the night did they cast over them. The night was the mighty bosom of revelations; in it the gods returned, and slumbered there, to go forth in new and in more glorious forms over the altered world.

Among the people above all despised, too soon matured, and wilful strangers to the blessed innocence of youth; among them, with features hitherto unseen, the new world came, in the poet's hut of poverty, a son of the first virgin mother, endless fruit of a mysterious embrace. The boding, budding wisdom of the East first recognised another Time's beginning; to the humble cradle of the monarch their star declared the way. In the name of the distant future, with splendour and with incense, did they make offering to him, the highest wonder of the world. In solitude did the heavenly heart unfold to a flowery chalice of almighty love, bent towards the holy countenance of the father, and resting on the happily—expectant bosom of the lovely pensive mother. With divine ardour did the prophetic eye of the blooming child look forth into the days of the future, towards his beloved, the offspring of the race of God, careless for his day's earthly destiny. The most child—like spirits, wondrously seized with a deep, heart—felt love, collected soon around him; as flowers, a new and unknown life budded forth upon his path. Words inexhaustible, the gladdest tidings fell, as sparks from a heavenly spirit, from his friendly lips. From a distant coast, born under Hellas' cheerful sky, a minstrel came to Palestine, and yielded his whole heart to the wondrous child:—

"The youth art thou, who for uncounted time,  
Upon our graves hast stood with hidden meaning;  
In hours of darkness a consoling sign,  
Of higher manhood's joyous, hailed beginning;  
That which hath made our soul so long to pine,  
Now draws us hence, sweet aspirations winning.  
In Death, eternal Life hath been revealed:  
And thou art Death, by thee we first are healed."

The minstrel wandered, full of joy, towards Hindostan, the heart elated with the sweetest love, which, beneath yonder heavens, he poured forth in fiery songs, so that a thousand hearts inclined towards him, and with a thousand branches grew towards heaven the joyous tidings. Soon after the minstrel's departure, the precious life became a sacrifice to the deep guilt of man: he died in youthful years, torn from the world he loved, from the weeping mother and lamenting friends. His mouth of love emptied the dark cup of inexpressible affliction. In fearful anguish approached the hour of the new world's birth. Deeply was he touched with the old world's fearful death the weight of the old world fell heavily upon him. Once more he gazed placidly upon the mother, then came the loosening hand of eternal love, and he slumbered. Few days only hung a deep veil over the swelling sea, over the quaking land; the beloved ones wept countless tears; the mystery was unsealed: the ancient stone heavenly spirits raised from the dark grave. Angels sat beside the slumberer, tenderly formed out of his dreams. Awakened in the new glory of a god, he ascended the height of the new—born world; and with his own hand buried within the deserted sepulchre the old one's corpse, and with almighty hand placed over it the stone no power can raise.

Yet do thy dear ones weep rich tears of joy, tears of emotion, and of eternal gratitude beside thy grave; even yet, with glad alarm, do they behold thee rise, themselves with thee; behold thee weeping, with sweet feeling, on the happy bosom of thy mother, solemnly walking with thy friends, speaking words as if broken from the tree of life; see thee hasten, full of longing, to thy Father's arms, bringing the young race of man, and the cup of a golden future, which shall never be exhausted. The mother soon followed thee in heavenly triumph; she was the first to join thee in the new home. Long ages have flown by since then, and ever in yet higher glory hath thy new

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creation grown, and thousands from out of pain and misery have, full of faith and longing, followed thee; roam with thee and the heavenly virgin in the realm of love, serve in the temple of heavenly Death, and are in eternity thine.

"Lifted is the stone,  
Manhood hath arisen:  
Still are we thine own,  
Unharm'd by bond or prison.  
When earth life fade away  
In the last meal's solemn gladness,  
Around thy cup dare stray  
No trace of grief or sadness.

To the marriage, Death doth call,  
The brilliant lamps are lighted;  
The virgins come, invited,  
And oil is with them all.  
Space now to space is telling  
How forth thy train hath gone,  
The voice of stars is swelling  
With human tongue and tone!

To thee, Maria, hallowed,  
A thousand hearts are sent;  
In this dark life and shadowed,  
On thee their thoughts are bent:  
The soul's releasement seeing  
They, longing, seek its rest;  
By thee pressed, holy being,  
Upon thy faithful breast.

How many who, once glowing,  
Earth's bitterness have learned,  
Their souls with grief o'erflowing,  
To thee have sadly turned;  
Thou pitying hast appear'd,  
In many an hour of pain;  
We come to thee now, wearied,  
There ever to remain.

By no cold grave now weepeth  
A faithful love, forlorn;  
Each still love's sweet rights keepeth,  
From none will they be torn.  
To soften his sad longing  
Her fires doth Night impart;  
From heaven cherubs thronging,  
Hold watch upon his heart.

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Content, our life advancing  
To a life that shall abide,  
Each flame its worth enhancing,  
The soul is glorified.  
The starry host shall sink then  
To bright and living wine,  
The golden draught we drink then,  
And stars ourselves shall shine.

Love released, lives woundless,  
No separation more;  
While life swells free and boundless  
As a sea without a shore.  
One night of glad elation,  
One joy that cannot die,  
And the sun of all creation  
Is the face of the Most High."

## VI LONGING FOR DEATH.

Below, within the earth's dark breast,  
From realms of light departing,  
There sorrow's pang and sigh oppressed  
Is signal of our starting.  
In narrow boat we ferry o'er  
Speedily to heaven's shore.

To us be hallowed endless Night,  
Hallowed eternal slumber!  
The day hath withered us with light,  
And troubles beyond number.  
No more 'mong strangers would we roam;  
We seek our Father, and our home.

Upon this world, what do we here,  
As faithful, fond, and true men?  
The Old but meets with scorn and sneer:—  
What care we for the New, then?  
Oh, lone is he, and sadly pines,  
Who loves with zeal the olden times!

Those old times when the spirits light  
To heaven as flame ascended;  
The Father's hand and features bright  
When men yet comprehended;  
When many a mortal, lofty-souled,  
Yet bore the mark of heavenly mould.

Those olden times when budded still

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The stems of ancient story,  
And children, to do Heaven's will,  
In pain and death sought glory;  
Those times when life and pleasure spoke,  
Yet many a heart with fond love broke.

Those old times when in fires of youth  
Was God himself revealéd,  
And early death, in love and truth,  
His sweet existence sealéd,  
Who put not from him care and pain,  
That dear to us he might remain.

With trembling longing these we see,  
By darkness now belated,  
In Time's dominions ne'er will be  
Our ardent thirsting sated.  
First to our home 'tis need we go,  
Seek we these holy times to know.

And our return what still can stay?  
Long have the best-loved slumbered;  
Their grave bounds for us life's drear way,  
Our souls with grief are cumbered.  
All that we have to seek is gone,  
The heart is full the world is lone.

Unending, with mysterious flame,  
O'er us sweet awe is creeping;  
Methought from viewless distance came  
An echo to our weeping;  
The loved ones long for us on high,  
And sent us back their pining sigh.

Below, to seek the tender bride,  
To Jesus, whom we cherish!  
Good cheer! lo, greys the even-tide,  
Love's agonies shall perish.  
A dream our fetters melt, at rest  
We sink upon the Father's breast.