

The Trial by Existence  
By Robert Frost

EVEN the bravest that are slain  
Shall not dissemble their surprise  
On waking to find valor reign,  
Even as on earth, in paradise;  
And where they sought without the sword  
Wide fields of asphodel fore'er,  
To find that the utmost reward  
Of daring should be still to dare.

The light of heaven falls whole and white  
And is not shattered into dyes,  
The light forever is morning light;  
The hills are verdured pasture-wise;  
The angel hosts with freshness go,  
And seek with laughter what to brave; —  
And binding all is the hushed snow  
Of the far-distant breaking wave.

And from a cliff-top is proclaimed  
The gathering of the souls for birth,  
The trial by existence named,  
The obscuration upon earth.  
And the slant spirits trooping by  
In streams and cross- and counter-streams  
Can but give ear to that sweet cry  
For its suggestion of what dreams!

And the more loitering are turned  
To view once more the sacrifice  
Of those who for some good discerned  
Will gladly give up paradise.  
And a white shimmering concourse rolls  
Toward the throne to witness there  
The speeding of devoted souls  
Which God makes his especial care.

And none are taken but who will,  
Having first heard the life read out  
That opens earthward, good and ill,  
Beyond the shadow of a doubt;  
And very beautifully God limns,  
And tenderly, life's little dream,  
But naught extenuates or dims,  
Setting the thing that is supreme.

Nor is there wanting in the press  
Some spirit to stand simply forth,  
Heroic in its nakedness,  
Against the uttermost of earth.  
The tale of earth's unhonored things  
Sounds nobler there than 'neath the sun;  
And the mind whirls and the heart sings,  
And a shout greets the daring one.

But always God speaks at the end:  
'One thought in agony of strife  
The bravest would have by for friend,  
The memory that he chose the life;  
But the pure fate to which you go  
Admits no memory of choice,  
Or the woe were not earthly woe  
To which you give the assenting voice.'

And so the choice must be again,  
But the last choice is still the same;  
And the awe passes wonder then,  
And a hush falls for all acclaim.  
And God has taken a flower of gold  
And broken it, and used therefrom  
The mystic link to bind and hold  
Spirit to matter till death come.

Tis of the essence of life here,  
Though we choose greatly, still to lack  
The lasting memory at all clear,  
That life has for us on the wrack  
Nothing but what we somehow chose;  
Thus are we wholly stripped of pride  
In the pain that has but one close,  
Bearing it crushed and mystified.