

THE CITY OF THE END OF THINGS.

BESIDE the pounding cataracts
 Of midnight streams unknown to us,
 'Tis builded in the dismal tracts
 And valleys huge of Tartarus.
 Lurid and lofty and vast it seems;
 It hath no rounded name that rings,
 But I have heard it called in dreams
 The City of the End of Things.

Its roofs and iron towers have grown
 None knoweth how high within the night,
 But in its murky streets far down
 A flaming terrible and bright
 Shakes all the stalking shadows there,
 Across the walls, across the floors,
 And shifts upon the upper air
 From out a thousand furnace doors;
 And all the while an awful sound
 Keeps roaring on continually,
 And crashes in the ceaseless round
 Of a gigantic harmony.
 Through its grim depths reëchoing,
 And all its weary height of walls,
 With measured roar and iron ring,
 The inhuman music lifts and falls.
 Where no thing rests and no man is,
 And only fire and night hold sway,
 The beat, the thunder, and the hiss
 Cease not, and change not, night nor day.

And moving at unheard commands,
 The abysses and vast fires between,
 Flit figures that, with clanking hands,
 Obey a hideous routine.
 They are not flesh, they are not bone,
 They see not with the human eye,

And from their iron lips is blown
 A dreadful and monotonous cry.
 And whoso of our mortal race
 Should find that city unaware,
 Lean Death would smite him face to face,
 And blanch him with its venom'd air;
 Or, caught by the terrific spell,
 Each thread of memory snapped and cut,
 His soul would shrivel, and its shell
 Go rattling like an empty nut.

It was not always so, but once,
 In days that no man thinks upon,
 Fair voices echoed from its stones,
 The light above it leaped and shone.
 Once there were multitudes of men
 That built that city in their pride,
 Until its might was made, and then
 They withered, age by age, and died;
 And now of that prodigious race
 Three only in an iron tower,
 Set like carved idols face to face,
 Remain the masters of its power;
 And at the city gate a fourth,
 Gigantic and with dreadful eyes,
 Sits looking toward the lightless north,
 Beyond the reach of memories:
 Fast-rooted to the lurid floor,
 A bulk that never moves a jot,
 In his pale body dwells no more
 Or mind or soul, — an idiot!

But some time in the end those three
 Shall perish and their hands be still,
 And with the masters' touch shall flee
 Their incommunicable skill.
 A stillness, absolute as death,
 Along the slacking wheels shall lie,
 And, flagging at a single breath,
 The fires shall smoulder out and die.
 The roar shall vanish at its height,
 And over that tremendous town
 The silence of eternal night
 Shall gather close and settle down.
 All its grim grandeur, tower and hall,
 Shall be abandoned utterly,
 And into rust and dust shall fall
 From century to century.
 Nor ever living thing shall grow,
 Or trunk of tree or blade of grass;

No drop shall fall, no wind shall blow,
Nor sound of any foot shall pass.
Alone of its accursèd state
One thing the hand of Time shall spare,
For the grim Idiot at the gate
Is deathless and eternal there!

Archibald Lampman.
