THE SELF

BY CHARLES EUGENE BANKS

Out of the cosmic cell I came,
    Out of the voiceless deep:
Kept alive by a mystic flame,
    Fighting endless sleep:
Groping upward, dumb and blind;
    Trackless the way before:
Mystery shrouding all behind
    Whispering "Nevermore"!

Fish and serpent, soaring bird
    Sweeping the azure dome:
Lion, leopard, caveman, Kurd,
    Each gave me a home.
Field or forest, man or beast,
    Weapon of claw or stone.
Always slaughter on flesh to feast,
    Always the sun-bleached bone.

Stark barbarian, pirate bold
    Sailing the wine-dark sea;
Miner braving the Arctic cold,
    These I came to be.
Always the eager endless quest,
    Always the inward fire,
Always the better out of the best,
    Always the heart's desire.
Urged by greed I rose to power,
I soared on eagle wings,
I fought for glory, had my hour
In company of kings;
Then down again to dreamless dark,
Close sealed in royal tomb,
With never a stroke of time to mark
The years of my golden gloom.

I woke to Beauty; my senses thrilled
With odors of evening cool;
A night bird sang, the pale moon spilled
Silver in dusky pool.
Winds roared, trees moaned; on shoreward seas
Plumed horsemen madly strove;
Flowers blushed in the amorous breeze
And I stood at the door of Love.

Calm-eyed Justice, crimson gowned,
Miser counting his gains;
Martyr deep in dungeon bound
Straining against his chains;
Yoeman, Noble, Hero, Seer,
Japheth or Shem or Ham,—
All I know of the past is here,
All I have been I am.
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