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Nature¹

[A Fragment by Georg Christoph Tobler]

Nature! We are surrounded and embraced by her—powerless to leave her and powerless to enter her more deeply. Unasked and without warning she sweeps us away in the round of her dance and dances on until we fall exhausted from her arms.

She brings forth ever new forms: what is there, never was; what was, never will return. All is new, and yet forever old.

We live within her, and are strangers to her. She speaks perpetually with us, and does not betray her secret. We work on her constantly, and yet have no power over her.

All her effort seems bent toward individuality, and she cares nothing for individuals. She builds always, destroys always, and her workshop is beyond our reach.

She lives in countless children, and the mother—where is she? She is the sole artist, creating extreme contrast out of the simplest material, the greatest perfection seemingly without effort, the most definite clarity always veiled with a touch of softness. Each of her works has its own being, each of her phenomena its separate idea, and yet all create a single whole.

She plays out a drama: we know not whether she herself sees it, and yet she plays it for us, we who stand in the corner.

There is everlasting life, growth, and movement in her and yet she does not stir from her place. She transforms herself constantly and there is never a moment's pause in her. She has no name for respite, and she has set her curse upon inactivity. She is firm. Her tread is measured, her exceptions rare, her laws immutable.

She thought and she thinks still, not as man, but as nature. She keeps to herself her own all-embracing thoughts which none may discover from her.

All men are in her and she in all. With all she plays a friendly game, and is glad as our winnings grow. With many she plays a hidden game which is ended before they know it.

Even what is most unnatural is nature. The one who does not see her everywhere sees her nowhere clearly.

She loves herself, she adores herself eternally with countless eyes and hearts. She has scattered herself to enjoy herself. She brings forth ever new enjoyers, insatiable in her need to share herself.

She delights in illusion. Whoever destroys this in himself and others she punishes as the sternest tyrant. Whoever follows her trustingly she takes to her heart like a child.

Her children are without number. From none does she withhold all gifts, but upon her favorites she lavishes much and for them she sacrifices much. She has lent her protection to greatness.

Her creatures are flung up out of nothingness with no hint of where they come from or where they are going—they are only to run; she knows the course.

She has few mainsprings to drive her, but these never wind down; they are always at work, always varied.

Her drama is ever new because she creates ever new spectators. Life is her most beautiful invention and death her scheme for having much life.

She wraps man in shadow and forever spurs him to find the light. She makes him a creature dependent upon the earth, sluggish and heavy, and then again and again she shakes him awake.

She gives us needs because she loves movement. A miracle, how little she uses to achieve all this movement. Every need is a favor. Soon satisfied, soon roused again. When she gives us another it is a source of new pleasure. But soon she comes into balance.

At every moment she prepares for the longest race and at every moment she is done with it.

She is vanity itself, but not our vanity. For us she has given herself paramount importance.

She lets every child practice his arts on her, every fool judge her; she allows thousands to pass over her dully, without seeing her. In all this she takes joy and from it she draws her profit.

We obey her laws even in resisting them; we work with her even in working against her.

All she gives she makes a blessing, for she begins by making it a need. She delays so that we long for her; she hurries so that we never have our fill of her.

She has neither language nor speech, but she makes tongues and hearts with which to feel and speak.

Her crown is love. Only through love do we come to her. She opens chasms between all beings, and each seeks to devour the other. She has set all apart to draw all together. With a few draughts from the cup of love she makes good a life full of toil.

She is all. She rewards herself and punishes herself, delights and torments herself. She is rough and gentle, charming and terrifying, im-

potent and all-powerful. All is eternally present in her. She knows nothing of past and future. The present is eternity for her. She is kind. I praise her with all her works. She is wise and still. We may force no explanation from her, wrest no gift from her, if she does not give it freely. She is full of tricks, but to a good end, and it is best not to take note of her ruses.

She is whole and yet always unfinished. As she does now she may do forever.

To each she appears in a unique form. She hides amid a thousand names and terms, and is always the same.

She has brought me here, she will lead me away. I trust myself to her. She may do as she will with me. She will not hate her work. It is not I who has spoken of her. No, what is true and what is false, all this she has spoken. Hers is the blame, hers the glory.

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