

On Learning of Einstein

Albert Einstein (1879 - 1955)

If Manitou the Mighty once moved his braves to war;
If thrice the scared groves have held a baton for our score;
If power of song can grip you upon its timeless wing
To sense a moment of delight as more than just you sing;
If any age has pulled you to thoughts you do not own
To know alone we do not live, but always share the throne
Of heaven with battalions who once did march before,
And retrospective others who will follow through your door;
If flesh observed while living conceals the moulding bone,
Or love can push you past the gate of logic to its own,
You may have felt a tremor, worlds moving out of sight,
Of shadows playing far beyond the rim of silent night;
This is the cry of freedom, this is the end to pain,
This anodyne anointing balm which gives eternal reign
To circumstance and jesting on which the rest hold play,
To what moves oft beyond the mind, yet holds us in its sway.

How shall I dare express it? Ideas that fly as birds
When given algebraic wing, plummet to earth as words.
Eternal notes in symbols require an elegy
That I, with simple pen, lack rhyme or rhythm to set free;
This huge, heroic figure, whose world seems far apart,
Could conquer Himalayan peaks yet keep a modest heart.

Some fields of his the world knows: of relativity,
And that bizarre equivalence twixt mass and energy.
Can light eject electrons? He first described the way,
For which effect the Nobel prize came under his wan sway.
Yet quantum physics fooled him; that magic isle so small,
Wherein the coins of Nature's bank finance the atom's stall.

For Heisenberg, Schrödinger and Bohr chance added spice,
To which he famously remarked, "My God does not play dice."
Now Einstein took a wrong path, and all his final years
Were spent at futile error's door - neglected by his peers -
For in the realm of man's thought, effect and cause both sing,
But deep within the atom's core blind chance alone is king.

Fantastic is the music that struggles 'gainst the past,
Complete in form, invariable, eternally set fast;
Just so each wave of knowledge, with its rewarding praise
Averting awe in Nature's Law, continues to amaze.
Yet all this hard-won knowledge yields not the final look
But words - whose sounds delight us all, while we ignore the book.

(c) John Marr