

The Palace

When I was a King and a Mason,
a Master Proven and skilled,
I cleared me ground for a Palace,
such as a King should build.
I decreed and dug down to my levels;
presently, under the silt,
I came on the wreck of a Palace,
such as a King had built.

There was no worth in the fashion;
there was no wit in the plan;
Hither and thither, aimless,
the ruined footings ran.
Masonry, brute, mishandled,
but carven on every stone,
"After me cometh a Builder;
tell him I, too, have known."

Swift to my use in my trenches,
where my well-planned groundworks grew,
I tumbled his quoins and his ashlar,
and cut and rest them anew.
Lime I milled of his marbles;
burned it, slaked it, and spread;
Taking and leaving at pleasure
the gifts of the humble dead.

Yet I despised not nor gloried,
yet, as we wrenched them apart,
I read in the razed foundation
the heart of that Builder's heart.
As he has risen and pleaded,
so did I understand
The form of the dream he had followed
in the face of the thing he had planned.

When I was a King and a Mason,
in the open noon of my pride,
They sent me a Word from the Darkness;
they whispered and called me aside.
They said, "The end is forbidden."

They said, "Thy use is fulfilled.
Thy Palace shall stand as that other's,
the spoil of a King who shall build."

I called my men from my trenches,
my quarries, my wharves, and my sheers;
All I had wrought I abandoned
to the faith of the faithless years.
Only I cut on the timber;
only I carved on the stone:
"After me cometh a Builder;
tell him I, too, have known."

— *Rudyard Kipling*