

A Fire

By Stephen Phillips

DAZZLED with watching how the swift fire fled
Along the dribbling roof, I turned my head ;
When lo, upraised beneath the lighted cloud
The illumed unconscious faces of the crowd !
Beautiful souls I knew and spirits dire,
A moment naked, and betrayed by fire ;
An old grey face in lovely bloom upturned,
The ancient rapture and the dream returned ;
A cautious face, now brilliant and rash,
The scheming eyes hither and thither flash ;
The experienced face, with all emotion crushed,
Now, as at some great wrong indignant, flushed ;
The hungering tramp with indolent gloating stare,
The beggar in glory and devoid of care :
That grey and trivial face, made up of needs,
Now pale and recent from triumphant deeds !
A mother slowly burning with bare breast,
Yet her consuming babe close to her prest ;
That prosperous citizen in anguish dire,
Beseeching heaven from purgatorial fire,
Souls unaware by sudden flame betrayed
I saw ; then through the darkness stole, afraid.