

The Palace - Rudyard Kipling

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 ground-works grew,
I tumbled his quoins and his ashlar, and cut and reset them anew.
Lime I milled of his marbles; burned it, slacked 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 foundations the heart of that builder's heart.
As he had written 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."