

Hymn of Breaking Strain

Rudyard Kipling

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The careful text books measure
(Let all who build beware!)
The load, the shock, the pressure
Material can bear.
So, when the buckled girder
Lets down the grinding span,
The blame of loss, or murder,
Is laid upon the man.
Not on the Stuff — the Man!

But in our daily dealing
With stone and steel, we find
The Gods have no such feeling
Of justice toward mankind.
To no set gauge they make us, —
For no laid course prepare —
And presently o'ertake us
With loads we cannot bear.
Too merciless to bear.

The prudent text-books give it
In tables at the end —
The stress that shears a rivet
Or makes a tie-bar bend —
What traffic wrecks macadam —
What concrete should endure —
But we, poor Sons of Adam,
Have no such literature,
To warn us or make sure!

We hold all Earth to plunder —
All Time and Space as well —
Too wonder-stale to wonder
At each new miracle;
Till, in mid-illusion
Of Godhead 'neath our hand,
Falls multiple confusion
On all we did or planned.
The mighty works we planned.

Hymn of Breaking Strain

We only of Creation
(Oh, luckier bridge and rail!)
Abide the twin—damnation —
To fail and know we fail.
Yet we — by which sole token
We know we once were Gods —
Take shame in being broken
However great the odds —
The Burden or the Odds.

Oh, veiled and secret Power
Whose paths we seek in vain,
Be with us in our hour
Of overthrow and pain;
That we — by which sure token
We know thy ways are true —
In spite of being broken,
Because of being broken,
May rise and build anew.
Stand up and build anew!