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To Joseph Smith

R. A. Christmas

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To Joseph Smith

Rough stone, cut from the mountain without hands,
 Why can't I match my will to your demands?
 Is it I love the flesh, the world, the devil,
 Too much to sacrifice my taste for evil?
 Or does my natural self, now slave, now free
 Of this or that, resent the hyperbole
 Of total dedication to one cause,
 No matter what, in spite of truth or laws?
 I would in shadows dwell, knowing the rights
 The wrongs, the damned; and satisfied with sights
 Of higher kingdoms, as they come and go:
 Christ could assign me to a bungalow.
 But you, second to Christ in saving men,
 Shall I respect, love, worship, or hate you then?
 Or can I blend these four as others do,
 And see you next to God and Christ, yet you?
 Your life is less divine, but more intense,
 For, mortal, it assaults intransigence,
 By proving that the flesh can take, like stone,
 A polish that approximates God's throne.
 But there is flesh and flesh, and mine, in doubt,
 Laziness, anger, lust, and pride decked out,
 Resists the edge of Christ, and keeps its feel;
 Battered, but never rounded, by the wheel.
 The certain call of God comes to but few;
 I cannot hear as easily as could you.

R. A. CHRISTMAS*

*Mr. Christmas, a doctoral candidate in medieval literature at the University of Southern California, completed his M.A. in 1963 at the University of California—Berkeley, where he won the Ina Coolbrith Memorial Poetry Prize in 1962.