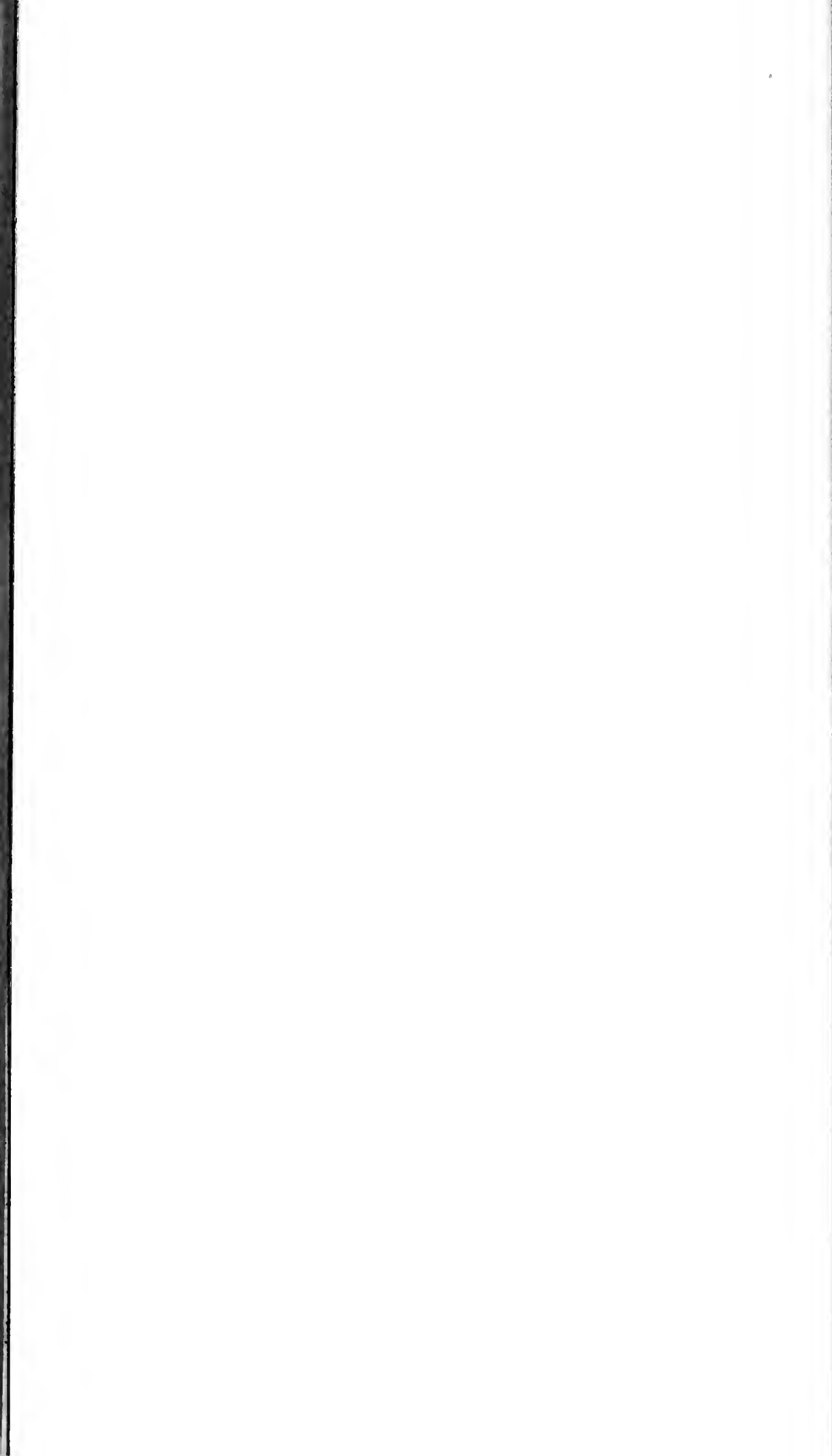


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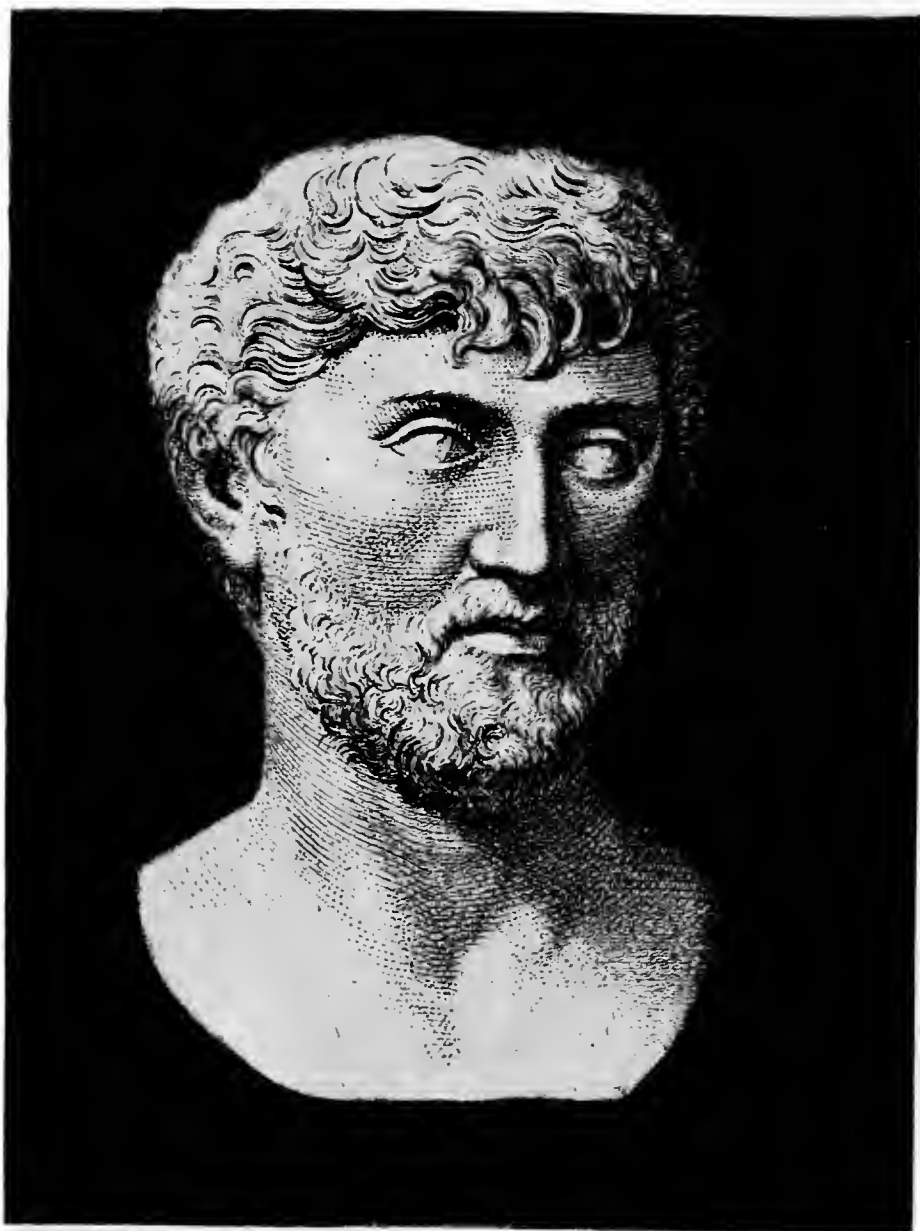






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*T. Lucretius Carus.*  
*from a print in the British Museum.*



T. LUCRETIUS CARUS

OF THE  
NATURE OF THINGS

A METRICAL TRANSLATION

BY

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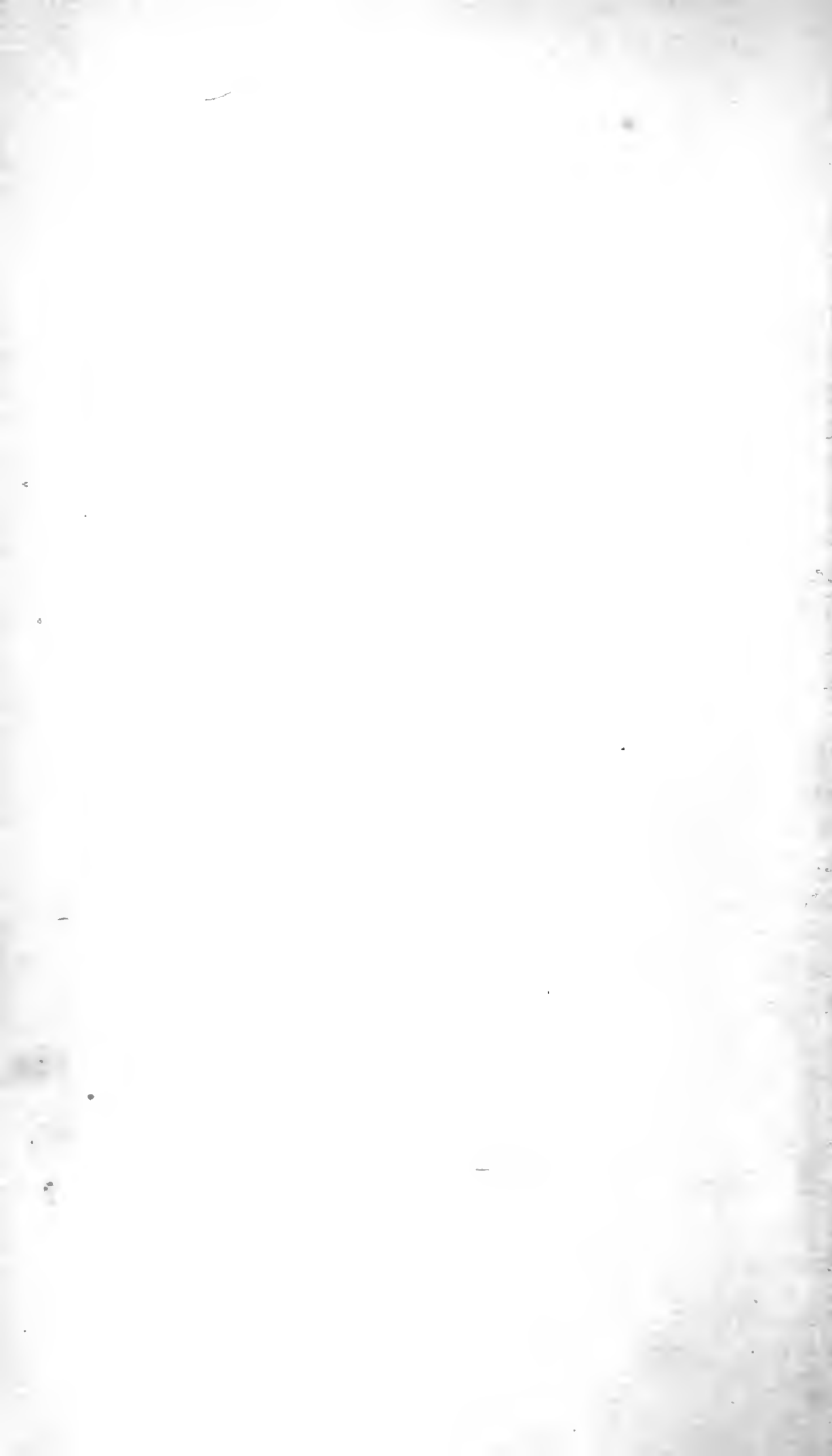


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PA 6483  
E2 L3  
1916

To  
MY COLLEAGUE  
GRANT SHOWERMAN  
AND THE MEMORY OF  
MY TEACHER  
THOMAS BOND LINDSAY

201751



## PREFACE

THE Latin text is that of Carlo Guissani (Torino, 1896-8). The Latinist should find no difficulty, however, in comparing the English with the Latin text of other editors, as Munro, Bailey, and Merrill; even though the Italian scholar modifies the familiar sequence of some paragraphs and lines. The temptation to adopt some special reading of word or phrase suggested by other scholars (as recently in Merrill's *Criticism of the Text of Lucretius*, Part I., Books I.-III., University of California, January 1916) has been for practical expediency consistently resisted.

The English, in its attempt to render the exact ideas in their details and in their relationships with the various arguments, is obligated, in the first instance, to Guissani's exhaustive, subtle, and well-pondered Italian commentary (including its citations from practically all preceding Lucretian scholars). But three years after completion, the whole translation was collated with the painstakingly literal prose translations of Munro and Bailey (the latter published some time after this translation was under way); and the first book had the benefit of the close scrutiny and manuscript comment of Merrill, while some scattered passages were improved by the verbal counsels of friends, the professors of Latin at the University of Wisconsin.<sup>1</sup> But in the last resort

<sup>1</sup> The two opening lines were taken out of a personal letter from Professor F. B. Gummere of Haverford College, who, in acknowledging a copy of the author's translation of the fragments of Empedocles, therein urged a new translation of Lucretius—the initial impulse to this work.

the translator was morally compelled to trust to his own judgment. He is aware that in some few renderings he departs from the opinions of men whose opinions he is the first to respect. If footnotes were in place, footnotes could readily be prepared in defence of all such departures—to prove, at least, that no word of the English text had been set down without conscientious meditation. It was discovered, with mingled pleasure and chagrin, that the present translator's verse sometimes had hit on the exact word or phrase of Munro's or Bailey's prose; with the result that in the final revision the author deliberately incorporated a few very apposite turns of expression from each. This seemed but in keeping with the ideal: to make, by whatever means, the translation as accurate as possible.

As accurate as possible: but the philosophic student of Lucretius will not construe this to mean the mechanical and pedantic accuracy of grammar and syntax. A friend who translated a volume for the *Loeb Classical Series* complained of a reviewer who took him to task for rendering *vela* as "sail": the reviewer had informed him that *vela* means "sails." It may be premised that there are many "grosser violations" of class-room parsing than "sail" for "sails" in the "exercise" that follows. There are not only singulars for plurals and *vice versa*: sometimes a subordinate clause is made co-ordinate and *vice versa*; sometimes an adjective is shifted from subject to predicate (*i.e.*, from cause to effect) and *vice versa*; sometimes, indeed, a passive construction is made active and *vice versa*; and sometimes a whole sentence is entirely reworked. The fact is, of course, that English idiom has its laws of accuracy too, especially if it is to support accuracy of thought for English readers. If current critical theory demanded of translators of

Hauptmann, Ibsen, and Nietzsche the sort of thing it seems to be demanding of the *Loeb* translators of the classics, Hauptmann, Ibsen, and Nietzsche would have still fewer readers in England and America and a still more distorted reputation than is their luck at present. The ideal seems to be that of the final examination paper; and this is but a recrudescence of "the idol of the book," of which mankind has heard so often before. It would be a triple shame if the worship of this idol drew our eyes away from the throbbing *reality* of the great living Roman, chief poet on the Tiber's side, and still among the chief by all the rivers of earth.

Moreover, however contrary to received opinion, certain considerations have persuaded the present translator that, for this very accuracy of *meaning*, verse is preferable to prose: (1) verse permits a wider and more apposite choice of syntactical constructions than the more conventional idioms of prose; (2) verse gives to the many repetitions of ideas, words, phrases, and clauses, which in a prose translation often seem mere jejune verbosity, their proper relevancy and copiousness—the *abbondanza Lucretiana* noted by Guissani; (3) verse, by its very cadences, by its metrical emphases, possesses, for driving home the central meanings and for distinguishing the nicer contrasts and other relations of the ideas, an instrument scarcely available in the pedestrian rhythms of prose.

But there is a still higher accuracy: the accuracy of the imagination, at once interpretative and creative—in the last analysis the activity which conditions, supports, and directs all accuracy in understanding and in reproducing the master's work. Without feeling and communicating the intellectual energy of Lucretius, his varied passion, his large utterance, the translator is without all instruments to hold the reader's mind *awake*

## x Of the Nature of Things

*and alert* to the things the master says ; attention will flag and both thought and poetry (to sunder, for the moment, what the gods have joined together) will grow vague, fragmentary, intermittent. For this reason the ingenious and brilliant literalness, the meticulous impeccability, of Munro's and of Bailey's translations is so hard to follow, and so inadequate except as a handbook (as such, quite priceless !) for the student with the Latin text before him : the very absence of imaginative fervour ruins the effect—the movement, the élan—of the ideas as *ideas*, because ruining their effect as *poetry*.

This higher accuracy in a translator's work may be compared to an actor's relation to his "Part." The actor attempts to conceive the totality of content and purpose and to conceive it by imaginative *Einfuehlung*, self-identification, assisted (it may well be) by analysis and calculation of the spiritual data already primarily realised *as data* by the imagination. His creative interpretation on the stage presents his Idea (*i.e.*, himself as the "Part") by the employment of the gesture, look, gait, pause, intonation, tempo, which is either an instinctive unfoldment from *within* or a studied calculation from *within*. Or both : always a *dramatic* process—if the achievement be *acting* and not mere technique and stage-tricks. Hence one actor makes us "understand Shakespeare," and another obscures or distorts Shakespeare, in the measure that he has entered into Shakespeare's spirit, or rather in the measure that Shakespeare's spirit has entered into him. This is elementary and familiar, of course. But translation as a dramatic process, as first self-identification and then creative interpretation from within, as Idea (*i.e.*, the translator as the "Part") presented by the imaginative employment of imaginatively intelligible and illuminat-



ing symbols, is a conception which, if equally elementary, seems *not* to be equally familiar. Yet there seems no gainsaying. And unless it be a dramatic process, it too becomes mere technique (*i.e.*, external scholarship) and stage-tricks (*i.e.*, external, non-organic devices of style).

And with this higher accuracy, most of all, is pedantry futile and beside the mark. Two brief illustrations will serve. The translator reads, let us say, a certain word in his text (*i.e.*, the Part he is learning to perform); this word has for his imagination connotations in the Latin text and in the Latin context (context of linguistic material, not necessarily of thought) which its best "equivalent" in English has not. His imagination prompts to the insertion of a word or phrase which in the literal sense is "not in the Latin"—*but it does the work* for the imagination of the English reader. Thus, to call it "padding" is to miss the point altogether. Again, the translator, or to be specific, the translator of Lucretius, is struck with the curious mixture of archaic and colloquial expressions, with the frequent rhymes, and with that insistent alliteration which the more delicate art of the next generation was to subdue to a quiet allusiveness. Is he mechanically to contrive an "equivalent" archaism, colloquialism, rhyme, or alliteration (down to the very alliterating letter!) for each separate case, or will he catch the ensemble effect and re-create it, as well as his medium, the foreign tongue and the foreign prosody, permits?

These notions about translating came to the author of this version, as conscious and formulated maxims, only long after the work was practically finished, and only by deduction from his experience in translating. How far they were vitally operative as unconscious principles in the work itself he cannot say. And how far

## xii      Of the Nature of Things

(whatever the mental processes of the transaction) he has wrought successfully, he cannot say, either.

It is not always easy to know just what Lucretius meant: however perennial his poetic and philosophic insight and power, his system is in some of its premisses outworn and in some of its details obscured; and, dying, too, before he had wrought it out to finished expression, he apparently left a broken and disordered text, which in all the extant MSS. has doubtless become still more problematic. It is not always easy to know just what Lucretius meant; but the present translator has tried to render it fairly easy for one to gather what he, the translator, thinks Lucretius meant.

He has loved Lucretius for many years, and the mighty spirit of the Roman has helped him to sustain many burdens of life. He can but hope that he has not altogether failed to communicate him to English and American readers ignorant of Latin. Lucretius is indeed a Voice for these supreme times.

WILLIAM ELLERY LEONARD.

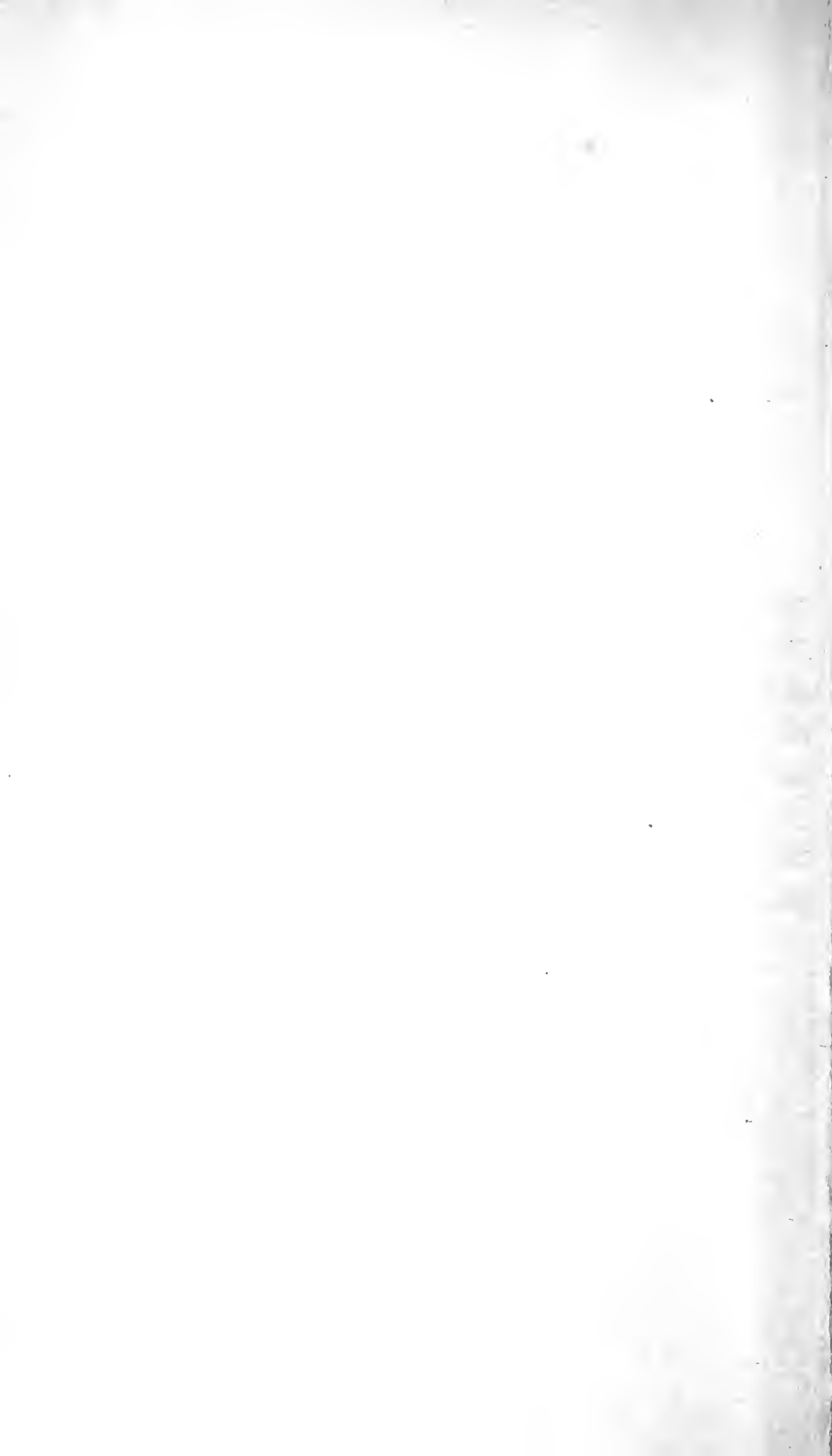
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN,  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,  
*June 3, 1916.*

## TO THE MASTER

IF to have paced within thy House of Thought  
Among thy Mountains, from its windowed wings  
Surveying dominions of the Law-of-Things  
As into cloud, and star, and tempest wrought,  
And trees, and gods, and cities,—if to have caught  
Thy splendour, and thy pathos, and thy song  
(Thy hand upon my shoulder, Master, long  
From room to aery room) avail me aught,

Then not without some scope of thy old truth,  
Then not without some ring of thy old worth,  
My sturdy voice of still unconquered youth  
Hath in an unknown tongue reported thee  
Unto a Continent of thy dear Earth . . .  
To thee unknown, beyond an unknown sea.

MADISON, WISCONSIN,  
*Summer of 1912.*



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# BOOK I

## SUMMARY <sup>1</sup>

Proem (1-145).

I. The nature of things in general (146-634).

A. General principles concerning the existence of things (146-482).

(a) Substance is eternal ; that is, there exist primordial bodies of things (146-328) ; because nothing is born from nothing (164-214), nothing is dissolved into nothing (215-264), and the invisible character of these primordial bodies does not disprove their existence (265-328).

(b) There exists also a void, that is, not only the space occupied by things, but also a space absolutely empty (329-417).

(c) Nothing exists *per se* except body and void ; all else is but accident of that which exists *per se* (418-482).

B. The primordial bodies are absolutely solid, indestructible, indivisible (483-634).

II. Complementary to I. Confutation of Heraclitus (635-704), of Empedocles (705-829), of Anaxagoras (830-920).

III. The infinity of the universe (921-1109).

<sup>1</sup> The summaries are after the Italian of Guissani, with modifications, and the numbers refer to the Latin text.



# OF THE NATURE OF THINGS

## BOOK I

### PROEM—I-145

MOTHER of Rome, delight of Gods and men,  
Dear Venus that beneath the gliding stars  
Makest to teem the many-voyagèd main  
And fruitful lands—for all of living things  
Through thee alone are evermore conceived,  
Through thee are risen to visit the great sun—  
Before thee, Goddess, and thy coming on,  
Flee stormy wind and massy cloud away,  
For thee the daedal Earth bears scented flowers,  
For thee the waters of the unvexèd deep  
Smile, and the hollows of the sérene sky  
Glow with diffusèd radiance for thee !  
For soon as comes the springtime face of day,  
And procreant gales blow from the West unbarred,  
First fowls of air, smit to the heart by thee,  
Foretoken thy approach, O thou Divine,  
And leap the wild herds round the happy fields  
Or swim the bounding torrents. Thus amain,  
Seized with the spell, all creatures follow thee  
Whithersoever thou walkest forth to lead,  
And thence through seas and mountains and swift  
streams,  
Through leafy homes of birds and greening plains,  
Kindling the lure of love in every breast,  
Thou bringest the eternal generations forth,

#### 4. Of the Nature of Things

Kind after kind. And since 'tis thou alone  
Guidest the Cosmos,<sup>1</sup> and without thee naught  
Is risen to reach the shining shores of light,  
Nor aught of joyful or of lovely born,  
Thee do I crave co-partner in that verse  
Which I presume on Nature to compose  
For Memmius mine, whom thou hast willed to be  
Peerless in every grace at every hour—  
Wherefore indeed, Divine one, give my words  
Immortal charm. Lull to a timely rest  
O'er sea and land the savage works of war,  
For thou alone hast power with public peace  
To aid mortality ; since he who rules  
The savage works of battle, puissant Mars,  
How often to thy bosom flings his strength  
O'ermastered by the eternal wound of love—  
And there, with eyes and full throat backward thrown,  
Gazing, my Goddess, open-mouthed at thee,  
Pastures on love his greedy sight, his breath  
Hanging upon thy lips. Him thus reclined  
Fill with thy holy body, round, above !  
Pour from those lips soft syllables to win  
Peace for the Romans, glorious Lady, peace !  
For in a season troublous to the state  
Neither may I attend this task of mine  
With thought untroubled, nor mid such events  
The illustrious scion of the Memmian house  
Neglect the civic cause.

Whilst human kind  
Throughout the lands lay miserably crushed  
Before all eyes beneath Religion—who

<sup>1</sup> In Greek, a technical term of that Stoic philosophy to which Lucretius was opposed ; but in English fairly equivalent to the Epicurean "*natura rerum*," through the associations of the word with Spencer's "*Cosmic Philosophy*" and with modern materialism.

Would show her head along the region skies,  
Glowing on mortals with her hideous face—  
A Greek it was who first opposing dared  
Raise mortal eyes that terror to withstand,  
Whom nor the fame of Gods nor lightning's stroke  
Nor threatening thunder of the ominous sky  
Abashed ; but rather chafed to angry zest  
His dauntless heart to be the first to rend  
The crossbars at the gates of Nature old.  
And thus his will and hardy wisdom won ;  
And forward thus he fared afar, beyond  
The flaming ramparts of the world, until  
He wandered the unmeasurable All.

Whence he to us, a conqueror, reports  
What things can rise to being, what cannot,  
And by what law to each its scope prescribed,  
Its boundary stone that clings so deep in Time.  
Wherefore religion now is under foot,  
And us his victory now exalts to heaven.

I know how hard it is in Latian verse  
To tell the dark discoveries of the Greeks,  
Chiefly because our pauper-speech must find  
Strange terms to fit the strangeness of the thing ;  
Yet worth of thine and the expected joy  
Of thy sweet friendship do persuade me on  
To bear all toil and wake the clear nights through,  
Seeking with what of words and what of song  
I may at last most gloriously uncloud  
For thee the light beyond, wherewith to view  
The core of being at the centre hid.  
And for the rest, summon to judgments true,  
Unbusied ears and singleness of mind  
Withdrawn from cares ; lest these my gifts, arranged  
For thee with eager service, thou disdain  
Before thou comprehendest : since for thee

## 6      Of the Nature of Things

I prove the súpreme law of Gods and sky,  
And the primordial germs of things unfold,  
Whence Nature all creates, and multiplies  
And fosters all, and whither she resolves  
Each in the end when each is overthrown.  
This ultimate stock we have devised to name  
Procreant atoms, matter, seeds of things,  
Or primal bodies, as primal to the world.

I fear perhaps thou deemest that we fare  
An impious road to realms of thought profane ;  
But 'tis that same religion oftener far  
Hath bred the foul impieties of men :  
As once at Aulis, the elected chiefs,  
Foremost of heroes, Danaan counsellors,  
Defiled Diana's altar, virgin queen,  
With Agamemnon's daughter, foully slain.  
She felt the chaplet round her maiden locks  
And fillets, fluttering down on either cheek,  
And at the altar marked her grieving sire,  
The priests beside him who concealed the knife,  
And all the folk in tears at sight of her.  
With a dumb terror and a sinking knee  
She dropped ; nor might avail her now that first  
'Twas she who gave the king a father's name.  
They raised her up, they bore the trembling girl  
On to the altar—hither led not now  
With solemn rites and hymeneal choir,  
But sinless woman, sinfully foredone,  
A parent felled her on her bridal day,  
Making his child a sacrificial beast  
To give the ships auspicious winds for Troy :  
Such are the crimes to which religion leads.

And there shall come the time when even thou,  
Forced by the soothsayer's terror-tales, shalt seek  
To break from us. Ah, many a dream even now

Can they concoct to rout thy plans of life,  
And trouble all thy fortunes with base fears.  
I own with reason : for, if men but knew  
Some fixèd end to ills, they would be strong  
By some device unconquered to withstand  
Religions and the menacings of seers.  
But now nor skill nor instrument is theirs,  
Since men must dread eternal pains in death.  
For what the soul may be they do not know,  
Whether 'tis born, or enter in at birth,  
And whether, snatched by death, it die with us,  
Or visit the shadows and the vasty caves  
Of Orcus, or by some divine decree  
Enter the brute herds, as our Ennius sang,  
Who first from lovely Helicon brought down  
A laurel wreath of bright perennial leaves,  
Renowned forever among the Italian clans.  
Yet Ennius too in everlasting verse  
Proclaims those vaults of Acheron to be,  
Though thence, he said, nor souls nor bodies fare,  
But only phantom figures, strangely wan,  
And tells how once from out those regions rose  
Old Homer's ghost to him and shed salt tears  
And with his words unfolded Nature's source.  
Then be it ours with steady mind to clasp  
The purport of the skies—the law behind  
The wandering courses of the sun and moon ;  
To scan the powers that speed all life below ;  
But most to see with reasonable eyes  
Of what the mind, of what the soul is made,  
And what it is so terrible that breaks  
On us asleep, or waking in disease,  
Until we seem to mark and hear at hand  
Dead men whose bones earth bosomed long ago.

I have seen how good it is

## SUBSTANCE IS ETERNAL—146—328

This terror, then, this darkness of the mind,  
 Not sunrise with its flaring spokes of light,  
 Nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse,  
 But only Nature's aspect and her law,  
 Which, teaching us, hath this exordium :  
*Nothing from nothing ever yet was born.*  
 Fear holds dominion over mortality  
 Only because, seeing in land and sky  
 So much the cause whereof no wise they know,  
 Men think Divinities are working there.  
 Meantime, when once we know from nothing still  
 Nothing can be create, we shall divine  
 More clearly what we seek : those elements  
 From which alone all things created are,  
 And how accomplished by no tool of Gods.  
 Suppose all sprang from all things : any kind  
 Might take its origin from any thing,  
 No fixèd seed required. Men from the sea  
 Might rise, and from the land the scaly breed,  
 And, fowl full fledged come bursting from the sky ;  
 The hornèd cattle, the herds and all the wild  
 Would haunt with varying offspring tilth and waste ;  
 Nor would the same fruits keep their olden trees,  
 But each might grow from any stock or limb  
 By chance and change. Indeed, and were there not  
 For each its procreant atoms, could things have  
 Each its unalterable mother old ?  
 But, since produced from fixèd seeds are all,  
 Each birth goes forth upon the shores of light  
 From its own stuff, from its own primal bodies.  
 And all from all cannot become, because  
 In each resides a secret power its own.  
 Again, why see we lavished o'er the lands

At spring the rose, at summer heat the corn,  
The vines that mellow when the autumn lures,  
If not because the fixèd seeds of things  
At their own season must together stream,  
And new creations only be revealed  
When the due times arrive and pregnant earth  
Safely may give unto the shores of light  
Her tender progenies ? But if from naught  
Were their becoming, they would spring abroad  
Suddenly, unforeseen, in alien months,  
With no primordial germs, to be preserved  
From procreant unions at an adverse hour.  
Nor on the mingling of the living seeds  
Would space be needed for the growth of things  
Were life an increment of nothing : then  
The tiny babe forthwith would walk a man,  
And from the turf would leap a branching tree—  
Wonders unheard of ; for, by Nature, each  
Slowly increases from its lawful seed,  
And through that increase shall conserve its kind.  
Whence take the proof that things enlarge and feed  
From out their proper matter. Thus it comes  
That earth, without her seasons of fixed rains,  
Could bear no produce such as makes us glad,  
And whatsoever lives, if shut from food,  
Prolongs its kind and guards its life no more.  
Thûs easier 'tis to hold that many things  
Have primal bodies in common (as we see  
The single letters common to many words)  
Than aught exists without its origins.  
Moreover, why should Nature not prepare  
Men of a bulk to ford the seas afoot,  
Or rend the mighty mountains with their hands,  
Or conquer Time with length of days, if not  
Because for all begotten things abides

The changeless stuff, and what from that may spring  
 Is fixed forevermore ? Lastly we see  
 How far the tilled surpass the fields untilled  
 And to the labour of our hands return  
 Their more abounding crops ; there are indeed  
 Within the earth primordial germs of things,  
 Which, as the ploughshare turns the fruitful clods  
 And kneads the mould, we quicken into birth.  
 Else would ye mark, without all toil of ours,  
 Spontaneous generations, fairer forms.  
 Confess then, naught from nothing can become,  
 Since all must have their seeds, wherefrom to grow,  
 Wherefrom to reach the gentle fields of air.

Hence too it comes that Nature all dissolves  
 Into their primal bodies again, and naught  
 Perishes ever to annihilation.

For, were aught mortal in its every part,  
 Before our eyes it might be snatched away  
 Unto destruction ; since no force were needed  
 To sunder its members and undo its bands.  
 Whereas, of truth, because all things exist,  
 With seed imperishable, Nature allows  
 Destruction nor collapse of aught, until  
 Some outward force may shatter by a blow,  
 Or inward craft, entering its hollow cells,  
 Dissolve it down. And more than this, if Time,  
 That wastes with eld the works along the world,  
 Destroy entire, consuming matter all,  
 Whence then may Venus back to light of life  
 Restore the generations kind by kind ?  
 Or how, when thus restored, may daedal Earth  
 Foster and plenish with her ancient food,  
 Which, kind by kind, she offers unto each ?  
 Whence may the water-springs, beneath the sea,  
 Or inland rivers, far and wide away,



Keep the unfathomable ocean full ?  
And out of what does Ether feed the stars ?  
For lapsèd years and infinite age must else  
Have eat all shapes of mortal stock away :  
But be it the Long Ago contained those germs,  
By which this sum of things recruited lives,  
Those same infallibly can never die,  
Nor nothing to nothing evermore return.  
And, too, the selfsame power might end alike  
All things, were they not still together held  
By matter eternal, shackled through its parts,  
Now more, now less. A touch might be enough  
To cause destruction. For the slightest force  
Would loose the weft of things wherein no part  
Were of imperishable stock. But now  
Because the fastenings of primordial parts  
Are put together diversly and stuff  
Is everlasting, things abide the same  
Unhurt and sure, until some power comes on  
Strong to destroy the warp and woof of each :  
Nothing returns to naught ; but all return  
At their collapse to primal forms of stuff.  
Lo, the rains perish which Ether-father throws  
Down to the bosom of Earth-mother ; but then  
Upsprings the shining grain, and boughs are green  
Amid the trees, and trees themselves wax big  
And lade themselves with fruits ; and hence in turn  
The race of man and all the wild are fed ;  
Hence joyful cities thrive with boys and girls ;  
And leafy woodlands echo with new birds ;  
Hence cattle, fat and drowsy, lay their bulk  
Along the joyous pastures whilst the drops  
Of white ooze trickle from distended bags ;  
Hence the young scamper on their weakling joints  
Along the tender herbs, fresh hearts afrisk

With warm new milk. Thus naught of what so seems  
Perishes utterly, since Nature ever  
Upbuilds one thing from other, suffering naught  
To come to birth but through some other's death.

1

And now, since I have taught that things cannot  
Be born from nothing, nor the same, when born,  
To nothing be recalled, doubt not my words,  
Because our eyes no primal germs perceive ;  
For mark those bodies which, though known to be  
In this our world, are yet invisible :  
The winds infuriate lash our face and frame,  
Unseen, and swamp huge ships and rend the clouds,  
Or, eddying wildly down, bestrew the plains  
With mighty trees, or scour the mountain tops  
With forest-crackling blasts. Thus on they rave  
With uproar shrill and ominous moan. The winds,  
'Tis clear, are sightless bodies sweeping through  
The sea, the lands, the clouds along the sky,  
Vexing and whirling and seizing all amain ;  
And forth they flow and pile destruction round,  
Even as the water's soft and supple bulk  
Becoming a river of abounding floods,  
Which a wide downpour from the lofty hills  
Swells with big showers, dashes headlong down  
Fragments of woodland and whole branching trees ;  
Nor can the solid bridges bide the shock  
As on the waters whelm : the turbulent stream,  
Strong with a hundred rains, beats round the piers,  
Crashes with havoc, and rolls beneath its waves  
Down-toppled masonry and ponderous stone,  
Hurling away whatever would oppose.  
Even so must move the blasts of all the winds,

<sup>1</sup> Dots denote a break in the Latin, not an editor's or translator's expurgation.

Which, when they spread, like to a mighty flood,  
 Hither or thither, drive things on before  
 And hurl to ground with still renewed assault,  
 Or sometimes in their circling vortex seize  
 And bear in cones of whirlwind down the world :  
 The winds are sightless bodies and naught else—  
 Since both in works and ways they rival well  
~~The mighty rivers, the visible in form.~~

Then too we know the varied smells of things  
 Yet never to our nostrils see them come ;  
 With eyes we view not burning heats, nor cold,  
 Nor are we wont men's voices to behold.  
 Yet these must be corporeal at the base,  
 Since thus they smite the senses : naught there is  
 Save body, having property of touch.

~~And raiment,~~ hung by surf-beat shore, grows moist,  
 The same, spread out before the sun, will dry ;  
 Yet no one saw how sank the moisture in,  
 Nor how by heat off-driven. Thus we know,  
 That moisture is dispersed about in bits  
 Too small for eyes to see. Another case :  
 A ring upon the finger thins away  
 Along the under side, with years and suns ;  
 The drippings from the eaves will scoop the stone ;  
 The hookèd ploughshare, though of iron, wastes  
 Amid the fields insidiously. We view  
 The rock-paved highways worn by many feet ;  
 And at the gates the brazen statues show  
 Their right hands leaner from the frequent touch  
 Of wayfarers innumerable who greet.  
 We see how wearing-down hath minished these,  
 But just what motes depart at any time,  
 The envious nature of vision bars our sight.  
 Lastly whatever days and nature add  
 Little by little, constraining things to grow

## 14      Of the Nature of Things

In due proportion, no gaze however keen  
Of these our eyes hath watched and known.    Nor more  
Can we observe what's lost at any time,  
When things wax old with eld and foul decay,  
Or when salt seas eat under beetling crags.  
Thus nature ever by unseen bodies works.

### THE VOID—329-417

But yet creation's neither crammed nor blocked  
About by body : there's in things a void—  
Which to have known will serve thee many a turn,  
Nor will not leave thee wandering in doubt,  
Forever searching in the sum of all,  
And losing faith in these pronouncements mine.  
There's place intangible, a void and room.  
For were it not, things could in nowise move ;  
Since body's property to block and check  
Would work on all and at all times the same.  
Thus naught could evermore push forth and go,  
Since naught elsewhere would yield a starting place.  
But now through oceans, lands, and heights of heaven,  
By divers causes and in divers modes,  
Before our eyes we mark how much may move,  
Which, finding not a void, would fail deprived  
Of stir and motion ; nay, would then have been  
Nowise begot at all, since matter, then,  
Had staid at rest, its parts together crammed.  
Then too, however solid objects seem,  
They yet are formed of matter mixed with void :  
In rocks and caves the watery moisture seeps,  
And beady drops stand out like plenteous tears ;  
And food finds way through every frame that lives ;  
The trees increase and yield the season's fruit  
Because their food throughout the whole is poured,  
Even from the deepest roots, through trunks and boughs ;

And voices pass the solid walls and fly  
 Reverberant through shut doorways of a house ;  
 And stiffening frost seeps inward to our bones.  
 Which but for voids for bodies to go through  
 'Tis clear could happen in nowise at all.  
 Again, why see we among objects some  
 Of heavier weight, but of no bulkier size ?  
 Indeed, if in a ball of wool there be  
 As much of body as in lump of lead,  
 The two should weigh alike, since body tends  
 To load things downward, while the void abides,  
 By contrary nature, the imponderable.  
 Therefore, an object just as large but lighter  
 Declares infallibly its more of void ;  
 Even as the heavier more of matter shows,  
 And how much less of vacant room inside.  
 That which we're seeking with sagacious quest  
 Exists, infallibly, commixed with things—  
 The void, the invisible inane.

Right here

I am compelled a question to expound,  
 Forestalling something certain folk suppose,  
 Lest it avail to lead thee off from truth :  
 Waters (they say) before the shining breed  
 Of the swift scaly creatures somehow give,  
 And straightway open sudden liquid paths,  
 Because the fishes leave behind them room  
 To which at once the yielding billows stream.  
 Thus things among themselves can yet be moved,  
 And change their place, however full the Sum—  
 Received opinion, wholly false forsooth.  
 For where can scaly creatures forward dart,  
 Save where the waters give them room ? Again,  
 Where can the billows yield a way, so long  
 As ever the fish are powerless to go ?

Thus either all bodies of motion are deprived,  
 Or things contain admixture of a void  
 Where each thing gets its start in moving on.

Lastly, where after impact two broad bodies  
 Suddenly spring apart, the air must crowd  
 The whole new void between those bodies formed ;  
 But air, however it stream with hastening gusts,  
 Can yet not fill the gap at once—for first  
 It makes for *one* place, ere diffused through *all*.  
 And then, if haply any think this comes,  
 When bodies spring apart, because the air  
 Somehow condenses, wander they from truth :  
 For then a void is formed, where none before ;  
 And, too, a void is filled which was before.  
 Nor can air be condensed in such a wise ;  
 Nor, granting it could, without a void, I hold,  
 It still could not contract upon itself  
 And draw its parts together into one.  
 Wherefore, despite demur and counter-speech,  
 Confess thou must there is a void in things.

And still I might by many an argument  
 Here scrape together credence for my words.  
 But for the keen eye these mere footprints serve,  
 Whereby thou mayest know the rest thyself.  
 As dogs full oft with noses on the ground,  
 Find out the silent lairs, though hid in brush,  
 Of beasts, the mountain-rangers, when but once  
 They scent the certain footsteps of the way,  
 Thus thou thyself in themes like these alone  
 Canst hunt from thought to thought, and keenly wind  
 Along even onward to the secret places  
 And drag out truth. But, if thou loiter loth  
 Or veer, however little, from the point,  
 This I can promise, Memmius, for a fact :  
 Such copious drafts my singing tongue shall pour

From the large well-springs of my plenished breast  
That much I dread slow age will steal and coil  
Along our members, and unloose the gates  
Of life within us, ere for thee my verse  
Hath put within thine ears the stores of proofs  
At hand for one soever question broached.

NOTHING EXISTS *per se* EXCEPT ATOMS AND THE VOID—  
418-482

But, now again to weave the tale begun,  
All nature, then, as self-sustained, consists  
Of twain of things : of bodies and of void  
In which they're set, and where they're moved around.  
For common instinct of our race declares  
That body of itself exists : unless  
This primal faith, deep-founded, fail us not,  
Naught will there be whereunto to appeal  
On things occult when seeking aught to prove  
By reasonings of mind. Again, without  
That place and room, which we do call the inane,  
Nowhere could bodies then be set, nor go  
Hither or thither at all—as shown before.  
Besides, there's naught of which thou canst declare  
It lives disjoined from body, shut from void—  
A kind of third in nature. For whatever  
Exists must be a somewhat ; and the same,  
If tangible, however light and slight,  
Will yet increase the count of body's sum,  
With its own augmentation big or small ;  
But, if intangible and powerless ever  
To keep a thing from passing through itself  
On any side, 'twill be naught else but that  
Which we do call the empty, the inane.  
Again, whate'er exists, as of itself,  
Must either act or suffer action on it,

Or else be that wherein things move and be :  
 Naught, saving body, acts, is acted on ;  
 Naught but the inane can furnish room.    And thus,  
 Beside the inane and bodies, is no third  
 Nature amid the number of all things—  
 Remainder none to fall at any time  
 Under our senses, nor be seized and seen  
 By any man through reasonings of mind.  
 Name o'er creation with what names thou wilt,  
 Thou'lt find but properties of those first twain,  
 Or see but accidents those twain produce.

A property is that which not at all  
 Can be disjoined and severed from a thing  
 Without a fatal dissolution : such,  
 Weight to the rocks, heat to the fire, and flow  
 To the wide waters, touch to corporal things,  
 Intangibility to the viewless void.  
 But state of slavery, pauperhood, and wealth,  
 Freedom, and war, and concord, and all else  
 Which come and go whilst nature stands the same,  
 We're wont, and rightly, to call accidents.  
 Even time exists not of itself ; but sense  
 Reads out of things what happened long ago,  
 What presses now, and what shall follow after :  
 No man, we must admit, feels time itself,  
 Disjoined from motion and repose of things.  
 Thus, when they say there " is " the ravishment  
 Of Princess Helen, " is " the siege and sack  
 Of Trojan Town, look out, they force us not  
 To admit these acts existent by themselves,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following version, though awkward as English, perhaps renders better the Stoic fallacy involved in the two senses of *esse* (to be) :

Thus when affirm they Helen raped *to be*,  
 And Trojan race in war *to be* o'ercome,  
 Look out, they force us not to admit these acts,  
 As such, *to be*—existent in themselves . . .



Merely because those races of mankind  
 (Of whom these acts were accidents) long since  
 Irrevocable age has borne away :  
 For all past actions may be said to be  
 But accidents, in one way, of mankind,—  
 In other, of some *region* of the world.  
 Add, too, had been no matter, and no room  
 Wherein all things go on, the fire of love  
 Upblown by that fair form, the glowing coal  
 Under the Phrygian Alexander's breast,  
 Had ne'er enkindled that renownèd strife  
 Of savage war, nor had the wooden horse  
 Involved in flames old Pergama, by a birth  
 At midnight of a brood of the Hellenes.  
 And thus thou canst remark that every act  
 At bottom exists not of itself, nor is  
 As body is, nor has like name with void ;  
 But rather of sort more fitly to be called  
 An accident of body, and of place  
 Wherein all things go on.

#### CHARACTER OF THE ATOMS—483-634

Bodies, again,  
 Are partly primal germs of things, and partly  
 Unions deriving from the primal germs.  
 And those which are the primal germs of things  
 No power can quench ; for in the end they conquer  
 By their own solidness ; though hard it be  
 To think that aught in things has solid frame ;  
 For lightnings pass, no less than voice and shout,  
 Through hedging walls of houses, and the iron  
 White-dazzles in the fire, and rocks will burn  
 With exhalations fierce and burst asunder.  
 Totters the rigid gold dissolved in heat ;

The ice of bronze melts conquered in the flame ;  
 Warmth and the piercing cold through silver seep,  
 Since, with the cups held rightly in the hand,  
 We oft feel both, as from above is poured  
 The dew of waters between their shining sides :  
 So true it is no solid form is found.

But yet because true reason and nature of things  
 Constrain us, come, whilst in few verses now  
 I disentangle how there still exist

Bodies of solid, everlasting frame—

The seeds of things, the primal germs we teach,  
 Whence all creation around us came to be.

First since we know a twofold nature exists,  
 Of things, both twain and utterly unlike—

Body, and place in which all things go on—

Then each must be both for and through itself,  
 And all unmixed : where'er be empty space,  
 There body's *not* ; and so where body bides,  
 There not at all exists the void inane.

Thus primal bodies are solid, without a void.

But since there's void in all begotten things,  
 All solid matter must be round the same ;

Nor, by true reason canst thou prove aught hides  
 And holds a void within its body, unless

Thou grant what holds it be a solid. Know,  
 That which can hold a void of things within

Can be naught else than matter in union knit.

Thus matter, consisting of a solid frame,

Hath power to be eternal, though all else,  
 Though all creation, be dissolved away.

Again, were naught of empty and inane,

The world were then a solid ; as, without  
 Some certain bodies to fill the places held,

The world that is were but a vacant void.

And so, infallibly, alternate-wise

Body and void are still distinguishèd,  
Since nature knows no wholly full nor void.  
There are, then, certain bodies, possessed of power  
To vary forever the empty and the full ;  
And these can nor be sundered from without  
By beats and blows, nor from within be torn  
By penetration, nor be overthrown  
By any assault soever through the world—  
For without void, naught can be crushed, it seems,  
Nor broken, nor severed by a cut in twain,  
Nor can it take the damp, or seeping cold  
Or piercing fire, those old destroyers three ;  
But the more void within a thing, the more  
Entirely it totters at their sure assault.  
Thus if first bodies be, as I have taught,  
Solid, without a void, they must be then  
Eternal ; and, if matter ne'er had been  
Eternal, long ere now had all things gone  
Back into nothing utterly, and all  
We see around from nothing had been born—  
But since I taught above that naught can be  
From naught created, nor the once begotten  
To naught be summoned back, these primal germs  
Must have an immortality of frame.  
And into these must each thing be resolved,  
When comes its súpreme hour, that thus there be  
At hand the stuff for plenishing the world.

. . . . .

So primal germs have solid singleness,  
Nor otherwise could they have been conserved  
Through aeons and infinity of time  
For the replenishment of wasted worlds.

Once more, if nature had given a scope for things  
To be forever broken more and more,  
By now the bodies of matter would have been

## Of the Nature of Things

So far reduced by breakings in old days  
 That from them nothing could, at season fixed,  
 Be born, and arrive its prime and top of life.  
 For, lo, each thing is quicker marred than made ;  
 And so whate'er the long infinitude  
 Of days and all fore-passèd time would now  
 By this have broken and ruined and dissolved,  
 That same could ne'er in all remaining time  
 Be builded up for plenishing the world.  
 But mark : infallibly a fixèd bound  
 Remaineth stablished 'gainst their breaking down ;  
 Since we behold each thing soever renewed,  
 And unto all, their seasons, after their kind,  
 Wherein they arrive the flower of their age.

Again, if bounds have not been set against  
 The breaking down of this corporeal world,  
 Yet must all bodies of whatever things  
 Have still endured from everlasting time  
 Unto this present, as not yet assailed  
 By shocks of peril. But because the same  
 Are, to thy thinking, of a nature frail,  
 It ill accords that thus they could remain  
 (As thus they do) through everlasting time,  
 Vexed through the ages (as indeed they are)  
 By the innumerable blows of chance.

So in our programme of creation, mark  
 How 'tis that, though the bodies of all stuff  
 Are solid to the core, we yet explain  
 The ways whereby some things are fashioned soft—  
 Air, water, earth, and fiery exhalations—  
 And by what force they function and go on :  
 The fact is founded in the void of things.  
 But if the primal germs themselves be soft,  
 Reason cannot be brought to bear to show  
 The ways whereby may be created these

Great crags of basalt and the during iron ;  
 For their whole nature will profoundly lack  
 The first foundations of a solid frame.  
 But powerful in old simplicity,  
 Abide the solid, the primeval germs ;  
 And by their combinations more condensed,  
 All objects can be tightly knit and bound  
 And made to show unconquerable strength.  
 Again, since all things kind by kind obtain  
 Fixed bounds of growing and conserving life ;  
 Since nature hath inviolably decreed  
 What each can do, what each can never do ;  
 Since naught is changed, but all things so abide  
 That ever the variegated birds reveal  
 The spots or stripes peculiar to their kind,  
 Spring after spring : thus surely all that is  
 Must be composed of matter immutable.  
 For if the primal germs in any wise  
 Were open to conquest and to change, 'twould be  
 Uncertain also what could come to birth  
 And what could not, and by what law to each  
 Its scope prescribed, its boundary stone that clings  
 So deep in Time. Nor could the generations  
 Kind after kind so often reproduce  
 The nature, habits, motions, ways of life,  
 Of their progenitors.

And then again,

Since there is ever an éxtreme bounding point  
 . . . . .  
 Of that first body which our senses now  
 Cannot perceive : That bounding point indeed  
 Exists without all parts, a minimum  
 Of nature, nor was e'er a thing apart,  
 As of itself,—nor shall hereafter be,  
 Since 'tis itself still parcel of another,

A first and single part, whence other parts  
 And others similar in order lie  
 In a packed phalanx, filling to the full  
 The nature of first body : being thus  
 Not self-existent, they must cleave to that  
 From which in nowise they can sundered be.  
 So primal germs have solid singleness,  
 Which tightly packed and closely joined cohere  
 By virtue of their minim particles—  
 No compound by mere union of the same ;  
 But strong in their eternal singleness,  
 Nature, reserving them as seeds for things,  
 Permitteth naught of rupture or decrease.

Moreover, were there not a minimum,  
 The smallest bodies would have infinites,  
 Since then a half-of-half could still be halved,  
 With limitless division less and less.  
 Then what the difference 'twixt the sum and least ?  
 None : for however infinite the sum,  
 Yet even the smallest would consist the same  
 Of infinite parts. But since true reason here  
 Protests, denying that the mind can think it,  
 Convinced thou must confess such things there are  
 As have no parts, the minimums of nature.  
 And since these are, likewise confess thou must  
 That primal bodies are solid and eterne.  
 Again, if Nature, creatress of all things,  
 Were wont to force all things to be resolved  
 Unto least parts, then would she not avail  
 To reproduce from out them anything ;  
 Because whate'er is not endowed with parts  
 Cannot possess those properties required  
 Of generative stuff—divers connections,  
 Weights, blows, encounters, motions, whereby things  
 Forevermore have being and go on.

## CONFUTATION OF OTHER PHILOSOPHERS—635-920

And on such grounds it is that those who held  
The stuff of things is fire, and out of fire  
Alone the cosmic sum is formed, are seen  
Mightily from true reason to have lapsed.  
Of whom, chief leader to do battle, comes  
That Heraclitus, famous for dark speech  
Among the silly, not the serious Greeks  
Who search for truth. For dolts are ever prone  
That to bewonder and adore which hides  
Beneath distorted words, holding that true  
Which sweetly tickles in their stupid ears,  
Or which is rouged in finely finished phrase.  
For how, I ask, can things so varied be,  
If formed of fire, single and pure ? No whit  
'Twould help for fire to be condensed or thinned,  
If all the parts of fire did still preserve  
But fire's own nature, seen before in gross.  
The heat were keener with the parts compressed,  
Milder, again, when severed or dispersed—  
And more than this thou canst conceive of naught  
That from such causes could become ; much less  
Might earth's variety of things be born  
From any fires soever, dense or rare.  
This too : if they suppose a void in things,  
Then fires can be condensed and still left rare ;  
But since they see such opposites of thought  
Rising against them, and are loath to leave  
An unmixed void in things, they fear the steep  
And lose the road of truth. Nor do they see,  
That, if from things we take away the void,  
All things are then condensed, and out of all  
One body made, which has no power to dart

Swiftly from out itself not anything—  
 As throws the fire its light and warmth around,  
 Giving thee proof its parts are not compact.  
 But if perhaps they think, in other wise,  
 Fires through their combinations can be quenched  
 And change their substance, very well : behold,  
 If fire shall spare to do so in no part,  
 Then heat will perish utterly and all,  
 And out of nothing would the world be formed.  
 For change in anything from out its bounds  
 Means instant death of that which was before ;  
 And thus a somewhat must persist unharmed  
 Amid the world, lest all return to naught,  
 And, born from naught, abundance thrive anew.  
 Now since indeed there are those surest bodies  
 Which keep their nature evermore the same,  
 Upon whose going out and coming in  
 And changèd order things their nature change,  
 And all corporeal substances transformed,  
 'Tis thine to know those primal bodies, then,  
 Are not of fire. For 'twere of no avail  
 Should some depart and go away, and some  
 Be added new, and some be changed in order,  
 If still all kept their nature of old heat :  
 For whatsoever they created then  
 Would still in any case be only fire.  
 The truth, I fancy, this : bodies there are  
 Whose clashings, motions, order, posture, shapes  
 Produce the fire and which, by order changed,  
 Do change the nature of the thing produced,  
 And are thereafter nothing like to fire  
 Nor whatso else has power to send its bodies  
 With impact touching on the senses' touch.<sup>1</sup>

Again, to say that all things are but fire

<sup>1</sup> For Lucretius all the senses are forms of the sense of touch.



And no true thing in number of all things  
 Exists but fire, as this same fellow says,  
 Seems crazèd folly. For the man himself  
*Against* the senses *by* the senses fights,  
 And hews at that through which is all belief,  
 Through which indeed unto himself is known  
 The thing he calls the fire. For, though he thinks  
 The senses truly can perceive the fire,  
 He thinks they cannot as regards all else,  
 Which still are palpably as clear to sense—  
 To me a thought inept and crazy too.  
 For whither shall we make appeal ? for what  
 More certain than our senses can there be  
 Whereby to mark asunder error and truth ?  
 Besides, why rather do away with all,  
 And wish to allow heat only, than deny  
 The fire and still allow all else to be ?—  
 Alike the madness either way it seems.  
 Thus whosoe'er have held the stuff of things  
 To be but fire, and out of fire the sum,  
 And whosoever have constituted air  
 As first beginning of begotten things,  
 And all whoever have held that of itself  
 Water alone contrives things, or that earth  
 Createth all and changes things anew  
 To divers natures, mightily they seem  
 A long way to have wandered from the truth.

Add, too, whoever make the primal stuff  
 Twofold, by joining air to fire, and earth  
 To water ; add who deem that things can grow  
 Out of the four—fire, earth, and breath, and rain ;  
 As first Empedocles of Acragas,  
 Whom that three-cornered isle of all the lands  
 Bore on her coasts, around which flows and flows  
 In mighty bend and bay the Ionic seas,

Splashing the brine from off their gray-green waves.  
Here, billowing onward through the narrow straits,  
Swift ocean cuts her boundaries from the shores  
Of the Italic mainland. Here the waste  
Charybdis ; and here Aetna rumbles threats  
To gather anew such furies of its flames  
As with its force anew to vomit fires,  
Belched from its throat, and skyward bear anew  
Its lightnings' flash. And though for much she seem  
The mighty and the wondrous isle to men,  
Most rich in all good things, and fortified  
With generous strength of heroes, she hath ne'er  
Possessed within her aught of more renown,  
Nor aught more holy, wonderful, and dear  
Than this true man. Nay, ever so far and pure  
The lofty music of his breast divine  
Lifts up its voice and tells of glories found,  
That scarce he seems of human stock create.

Yet he and those forementioned (known to be  
So far beneath him, less than he in all),  
Though, as discoverers of much goodly truth,  
They gave, as 'twere from out the heart's own shrine,  
Responses holier and soundlier based  
Than ever the Pythia pronounced for men  
From out the tripod and the Delphian laurel,  
Have still in matter of first-elements  
Made ruin of themselves, and, great men, great  
Indeed and heavy there for them the fall :  
First, because, banishing the void from things,  
They yet assign them motion, and allow  
Things soft and loosely textured to exist,  
As air, dew, fire, earth, animals, and grains,  
Without admixture of void amid their frame.  
Next, because, thinking there can be no end  
In cutting bodies down to less and less

Nor pause established to their breaking up,  
They hold there is no minimum in things ;  
Albeit we see the boundary point of aught  
Is that which to our senses seems its least,  
Whereby thou mayst conjecture, that, because  
The things thou canst not mark have boundary points,  
They surely have their minimums. Then, too,  
Since these philosophers ascribe to things  
Soft primal germs, which we behold to be  
Of birth and body mortal, thus, throughout,  
The sum of things must be returned to naught,  
And, born from naught, abundance thrive anew—  
Thou seest how far each doctrine stands from truth.

And, next, these bodies are among themselves  
In many ways poisons and foes to each,  
Wherefore their congress will destroy them quite  
Or drive asunder as we see in storms  
Rains, winds, and lightnings all asunder fly.

Thus too, if all things are create of four,  
And all again dissolved into the four,  
How can the four be called the primal germs  
Of things, more than all things themselves be thought,  
By retroversion, primal germs of them ?  
For ever alternately are both begot,  
With interchange of nature and aspect  
From immemorial time. But if percase  
Thou think'st the frame of fire and earth, the air,  
The dew of water can in *such* wise meet  
As not by mingling to resign their nature,  
From them for thee no world can be create~~d~~  
No thing of breath, no stock or stalk of tree :  
In the wild congress of this varied heap  
Each thing its proper nature will display,  
And air will palpably be seen mixed up  
With earth together, unquenched heat with water.

But primal germs in bringing things to birth  
 Must have a latent, unseen quality,  
 Lest some outstanding alien element  
 Confuse and minish in the thing create  
 Its proper being.

But these men begin  
 From heaven, and from its fires ; and first they feign  
 That fire will turn into the winds of air,  
 Next, that from air the rain begotten is,  
 And earth created out of rain, and then  
 That all, reversely, are returned from earth—  
 The moisture first, then air, thereafter heat—  
 And that these same ne'er cease in interchange,  
 To go their ways from heaven to earth, from earth  
 Unto the stars of the aethereal world—  
 Which in no wise at all the germs can do.  
 Since an immutable somewhat still must be,  
 Lest all things utterly be sped to naught ;  
 For change in anything from out its bounds  
 Means instant death of that which was before.  
 Wherefore, since *those* things, mentioned heretofore,  
 Suffer a changèd state, they must derive  
 From others ever unconvertible,  
 Lest all things utterly return to naught.  
 Then why not rather presuppose there be  
 Bodies with such a nature furnished forth  
 That, if perchance they have created fire,  
 Can still (by virture of a few withdrawn,  
 Or added few, and motion and order changed)  
 Fashion the winds of air, and thus all things  
 Forevermore be interchanged with all ?

“ But facts in proof are manifest,” thou sayest,  
 “ That all things grow into the winds of air  
 And forth from earth are nourished, and unless  
 The season favour at propitious hour

With rains enough to set the trees a-reel  
 Under the soak of bulking thunderheads,  
 And sun, for its share, foster and give heat,  
 No grains, nor trees, nor breathing things can grow."  
 True—and unless hard food and moisture soft  
 Recruited man, his frame would waste away,  
 And life dissolve from out his thews and bones ;  
 For out of doubt recruited and fed are we  
 By certain things, as other things by others.  
 Because in many ways the many germs  
 Common to many things are mixed in things,  
 No wonder 'tis that therefore divers things  
 By divers things are nourished. And, again,  
 Often it matters vastly with *what* others,  
 In *what* positions the primordial germs  
 Are bound together, and *what* motions, too,  
 They give and get among themselves ; for these  
 Same germs do put together sky, sea, lands,  
 Rivers, and sun, grains, trees, and breathing things,  
 But yet commixed they are in divers modes  
 With divers things, forever as they move.  
 Nay, thou beholdest in our verses here  
 Elements many, common to many words,  
 Albeit thou must confess each verse, each word  
 From one another differs both in sense  
 And ring of sound—so much the elements  
 Can bring about by change of order alone.  
 But those which are the primal germs of things  
 Have power to work more combinations still,  
 Whence divers things can be produced in turn.

Now let us also take for scrutiny  
 The homéomería of Anaxagoras,  
 So called by Greeks, for which our pauper-speech  
 Yieldeth no name in the Italian tongue,  
 Although the thing itself is not o'erhard

For explanation. First, then, when he speaks  
 Of this homéomería of things, he thinks  
 Bones to be sprung from littlest bones minute,  
 And from minute and littlest flesh all flesh,  
 And blood created out of drops of blood,  
 Conceiving gold compact of grains of gold,  
 And earth concreted out of bits of earth,  
 Fire made of fires, and water out of waters,  
 Feigning the like with all the rest of stuff.  
 Yet he concedes not any void in things,  
 Nor any limit to cutting bodies down.  
 Wherefore to me he seems on both accounts  
 To err no less than those we named before.  
 Add too : these germs he feigns are far too frail—  
 If they be germs primordial furnished forth  
 With but same nature as the things themselves,  
 And travail and perish equally with those,  
 And no rein curbs them from annihilation.  
 For which will last against the grip and crush  
 Under the teeth of death ? the fire ? the moist ?  
 Or else the air ? which then ? the blood ? the bones ?  
 No one, methinks, when every thing will be  
 At bottom as mortal as whate'er we mark  
 To perish by force before our gazing eyes.  
 But my appeal is to the proofs above  
 That things cannot fall back to naught, nor yet  
 From naught increase. And now again, since food  
 Augments and nourishes the human frame,  
 'Tis thine to know our veins and blood and bones  
 And thews are formed of particles unlike  
 To them in kind ; or if they say all foods  
 Are of mixed substance having in themselves  
 Small bodies of thews, and bones, and also veins  
 And particles of blood, then every food,  
 Solid or liquid, must itself be thought

As made and mixed of things unlike in kind—  
 Of bones, of thews, of ichor and of blood.  
 Again, if all the bodies which upgrow  
 From earth, are first within the earth, then earth  
 Must be compound of alien substances  
 Which spring and bloom abroad from out the earth.  
 Transfer the argument, and thou may'st use  
 The selfsame words : if flame and smoke and ash  
 Still lurk unseen within the wood, the wood  
 Must be compound of alien substances  
 Which spring from out the wood.

Right here remains

A certain slender means to skulk from truth,  
 Which Anaxagoras takes unto himself,  
 Who holds that all things lurk commixed with all  
 While *that* one only comes to view, of which  
 The bodies exceed in number all the rest,  
 And lie more close to hand and at the fore—  
 A notion banished from true reason far.  
 For then 'twere meet that kernels of the grains  
 Should oft, when crunched between the might of stones,  
 Give forth a sign of blood, or of aught else  
 Which in our human frame is fed ; and that  
 Rock rubbed on rock should yield a gory ooze.  
 Likewise the herbs ought oft to give forth drops  
 Of sweet milk, flavoured like the uddered sheep's ;  
 Indeed we ought to find, when crumbling up  
 The earthy clods, there herbs, and grains, and leaves,  
 All sorts dispersed minutely in the soil ;  
 Lastly we ought to find in cloven wood  
 Ashes and smoke and bits of fire there hid.  
 But since fact teaches this is not the case,  
 'Tis thine to know things are not mixed with things  
 Thuswise ; but seeds, common to many things,  
 Commixed in many ways, must lurk in things.

“ But often it happens on skiey hills,” thou sayest,  
 “ That neighbouring tops of lofty trees are rubbed  
 One against other, smote by the blustering south,  
 Till all ablaze with bursting flower of flame.”  
 Good sooth—yet fire is not ingraft in wood,  
 But many are the seeds of heat, and when  
 Rubbing together they together flow,  
 They start the conflagrations in the forests.  
 Whereas if flame, already fashioned, lay  
 Stored up within the forests, then the fires  
 Could not for any time be kept unseen,  
 But would be laying all the wildwood waste  
 And burning all the boscage. Now dost see  
 (Even as we said a little space above)  
 How mightily it matters with *what* others,  
 In *what* positions these same primal germs  
 Are bound together? And *what* motions, too,  
 They give and get among themselves? how, hence,  
 The same, if altered ’mongst themselves, can body  
 Both igneous and ligneous objects forth—  
 Precisely as these words themselves are made  
 By somewhat altering their elements,  
 Although we mark with name indeed distinct  
 The igneous from the ligneous. Once again,  
 If thou suppose whatever thou beholdest,  
 Among all visible objects, cannot be,  
 Unless thou feign bodies of matter endowed  
 With a like nature,—by thy vain device  
 For thee will perish all the germs of things :  
 ’Twill come to pass they’ll laugh aloud, like men,  
 Shaken asunder by a spasm of mirth,  
 Or moisten with salty tear-drops cheeks and chins.



## THE INFINITY OF THE UNIVERSE—921-1109

Now learn of what remains ! More keenly hear !  
And for myself, my mind is not deceived  
How dark it is : But the large hope of praise  
Hath strook with pointed thyrsus through my heart ;  
On the same hour hath strook into my breast  
Sweet love of the Muses, wherewith now instinct,  
I wander afield, thriving in sturdy thought,  
Through unpathed haunts of the Pierides,  
Trodden by step of none before. I joy  
To come on undefilèd fountains there,  
To drain them deep ; I joy to pluck new flowers,  
To seek for this my head a signal crown  
From regions where the Muses never yet  
Have garlanded the temples of a man :  
First, since I teach concerning mighty things,  
And go right on to loose from round the mind  
The tightened coils of dread religiòn ;  
Next, since, concerning themes so dark, I frame  
Song so pellucid, touching all throughout  
Even with the Muses' charm—which, as 'twould seem,  
Is not without a reasonable ground :  
But as physicians, when they seek to give  
Young boys the nauseous wormwood, first do touch  
The brim around the cup with the sweet juice  
And yellow of the honey, in order that  
The thoughtless age of boyhood be cajoled  
As far as the lips, and meanwhile swallow down  
The wormwood's bitter draught, and, though befooled,  
Be yet not merely duped, but rather thus  
Grow strong again with recreated health :  
So now I too (since this my doctrine seems  
In general somewhat woeful unto those  
Who've had it not in hand, and since the crowd

Starts back from it in horror) have desired  
 To expound our doctrine unto thee in song  
 Soft-speaking and Pierian, and, as 'twere,  
 To touch it with sweet honey of the Muse—  
 If by such method haply I might hold  
 The mind of thee upon these lines of ours,  
 Till thou see through the nature of all things,  
 And how exists the interwoven frame.

But since I've taught that bodies of matter, made  
 Completely solid, hither and thither fly  
 Forevermore unconquered through all time,  
 Now come, and whether to the sum of them  
 There be a limit or be none, for thee :  
 Let us unfold ; likewise what has been found  
 To be the wide inane, or room, or space  
 Wherein all things soever do go on,  
 Let us examine if it finite be  
 All and entire, or reach unmeasured round  
 And downward an illimitable profound.

Thus, then, the All that is is limited  
 In no one region of its onward paths,  
 For then 't must have forever its beyond.  
 And a beyond 'tis seen can never be  
 For aught, unless still further on there be  
 A somewhat somewhere that may bound the same—  
 So that the thing be seen still on to where  
 The nature of sensation of that thing  
 Can follow it no longer. Now because  
 Confess we must there's naught beside the sum,  
 There's no beyond, and so it lacks all end.  
 It matters nothing where thou post thyself,  
 In whatsoever regions of the same ;  
 Even any place a man has set him down  
 Still leaves about him the unbounded all  
 Outward in all directions ; or, supposing

A moment the all of space finite to be,  
If some one farthest traveller runs forth  
Unto the extreme coasts and throws ahead  
A flying spear, is't then thy wish to think  
It goes, hurled off amain, to where 'twas sent  
And shoots afar, or that some object there  
Can thwart and stop it? For the one or other  
Thou must admit and take. Either of which  
Shuts off escape for thee, and does compel  
That thou concede the all spreads everywhere,  
Owning no confines. Since whether there be  
Aught that may block and check it so it comes  
Not where 'twas sent, nor lodges in its goal,  
Or whether borne along, in either view  
'Thas started not from any end. And so  
I'll follow on, and wheresoe'er thou set  
The extreme coasts, I'll query, " what becomes  
Thereafter of thy spear? " 'Twill come to pass  
That nowhere can a world's-end be, and that  
The chance for further flight prolongs forever  
The flight itself. Besides, were all the space  
Of the totality and sum shut in  
With fixed coasts, and bounded everywhere,  
Then would the abundance of world's matter flow  
Together by solid weight from everywhere  
Still downward to the bottom of the world,  
Nor aught could happen under cope of sky,  
Nor could there be a sky at all or sun—  
Indeed, where matter all one heap would lie,  
By having settled during infinite time.  
But in reality, repose is given  
Unto no bodies 'mongst the elements,  
Because there is no bottom whereunto  
They might, as 'twere, together flow, and where  
They might take up their undisturbed abodes.

In endless motion everything goes on  
 Forevermore ; out of all regions, even  
 Out of the pit below, from forth the vast,  
 Are hurtled bodies evermore supplied.  
 The nature of room, the space of the abyss  
 Is such that even the flashing thunderbolts  
 Can neither speed upon their courses through,  
 Gliding across eternal tracts of time,  
 Nor, further, bring to pass, as on they run,  
 That they may bate their journeying one whit :  
 Such huge abundance spreads for things around—  
 Room off to every quarter, without end.  
 Lastly, before our very eyes is seen  
 Thing to bound thing : air hedges hill from hill,  
 And mountain walls hedge air ; land ends the sea,  
 And sea in turn all lands ; but for the All  
 Truly is nothing which outside may bound.  
 That, too, the sum of things itself may not  
 Have power to fix a measure of its own,  
 Great nature guards, she who compels the void  
 To bound all body, as body all the void,  
 Thus rendering by these alternates the whole  
 An infinite ; or else the one or other,  
 Being unbounded by the other, spreads,  
 Even by its single nature, ne'ertheless  
 Immeasurably forth. . . .  
 Nor sea, nor earth, nor shining vaults of sky,  
 Nor breed of mortals, nor holy limbs of gods  
 Could keep their place least portion of an hour :  
 For, driven apart from out its meetings fit,  
 The stock of stuff, dissolvèd, would be borne  
 Along the illimitable inane afar,  
 Or rather, in fact, would ne'er have once combined  
 And given a birth to aught, since, scattered wide,  
 It could not be united. For of truth

Neither by counsel did the primal germs  
'Stablish themselves, as by keen act of mind,  
Each in its proper place ; nor did they make,  
Forsooth, a compact how each germ should move ;  
But since, being many and changed in many modes  
Along the All, they're driven abroad and vexed  
By blow on blow, even from all time of old,  
They thus at last, after attempting all  
The kinds of motion and conjoining, come  
Into those great arrangements out of which  
This sum of things established is create,  
By which, moreover, through the mighty years,  
It is preserved, when once it has been thrown  
Into the proper motions, bringing to pass  
That ever the streams refresh the greedy main  
With river-waves abounding, and that earth,  
Lapped in warm exhalations of the sun,  
Renews her broods, and that the lusty race  
Of breathing creatures bears and blooms, and that  
The gliding fires of ether are alive—  
What still the primal germs nowise could do,  
Unless from out the infinite of space  
Could come supply of matter, whence in season  
They're wont whatever losses to repair.  
For as the nature of breathing creatures wastes,  
Losing its body, when deprived of food :  
So all things have to be dissolved as soon  
As matter, diverted by what means soever  
From off its course, shall fail to be on hand.  
Nor can the blows from outward still conserve,  
On every side, whatever sum of a world  
Has been united in a whole. They can  
Indeed, by frequent beating, check a part,  
Till others arriving may fulfil the sum ;  
But meanwhile often are they forced to spring

Rebounding back, and, as they spring, to yield,  
 Unto those elements whence a world derives,  
 Room and a time for flight, permitting them  
 To be from off the massy union borne  
 Free and afar. Wherefore, again, again :  
 Needs must there come a many for supply ;  
 And also, that the blows themselves shall be  
 Unfailing ever, must there ever be  
 An infinite force of matter all sides round.

And in these problems, shrink, my Memmius, far  
 From yielding faith to that notorious talk :  
 That all things inward to the centre press ;  
 And thus the nature of the world stands firm  
 With never blows from outward, nor can be  
 Nowhere disparted—since all height and depth  
 Have always inward to the centre pressed  
 (If thou art ready to believe that aught  
 Itself can rest upon itself) ; or that  
 The ponderous bodies which be under earth  
 Do all press upwards and do come to rest  
 Upon the earth, in some way upside down,  
 Like to those images of things we see  
 At present through the waters. They contend,  
 With like procedure, that all breathing things  
 Head downward roam about, and yet cannot  
 Tumble from earth to realms of sky below,  
 No more than these our bodies wing away  
 Spontaneously to vaults of sky above ;  
 That, when those creatures look upon the sun,  
 We view the constellations of the night ;  
 And that with us the seasons of the sky  
 They thus alternately divide, and thus  
 Do pass the nights coequal to our days,  
 But a vain [error has given] <sup>1</sup> these [dreams] to fools,

<sup>1</sup> Brackets denote an attempt to supply a short lacuna.

What they've embraced [with reasoning perverse].  
 For centre none can be [where world is still]  
 Boundless, nor yet, if now a centre were,  
 Could aught take there a fixed position [more]  
 Than for some other cause ['t might be dislodged].  
 For all of room and space we call [the void]  
 [Must] both through centre and non-centre yield  
 Alike to weights where'er their motions tend.  
 Nor is there any place, where, when they've come,  
 Bodies can be at standstill in the void,  
 Deprived of force of weight ; nor yet may void  
 Furnish support to any,—nay, it must,  
 True to its bent of nature, still give way.  
 Thus in such manner not at all can things  
 Be held in union, as if overcome  
 By craving for a centre.

But besides,

Seeing they feign that not all bodies press  
 To centre inward, rather only those  
 Of earth and water (liquid of the sea,  
 And the big billows from the mountain slopes,  
 And whatsoever are encased, as 'twere,  
 In earthen body), contrariwise, they teach  
 How the thin air, and with it the hot fire,  
 Is borne asunder from the centre, and how,  
 For this all ether quivers with bright stars,  
 And the sun's flame along the blue is fed  
 (Because the heat, from out the centre flying,  
 All gathers there), and how, again, the boughs  
 Upon the tree-tops could not sprout their leaves,  
 Unless, little by little, from out the earth  
 For each were nutriment . . .

. . . . .

Lest, after the manner of the wingèd flames,  
 The ramparts of the world should flee away,

Dissolved amain throughout the mighty void,  
 And lest all else should likewise follow after,  
 Aye, lest the thundering vaults of heaven should burst  
 And splinter upward, and the earth forthwith  
 Withdraw from under our feet, and all its bulk,  
 Among its mingled wrecks and those of heaven,  
 With slipping asunder of the primal seeds,  
 Should pass, along the immeasurable inane,  
 Away forever, and, that instant, naught  
 Of wrack and remnant would be left, beside  
 The desolate space, and germs invisible.  
 For on whatever side thou deemest first  
 The primal bodies lacking, lo, that side  
 Will be for things the very door of death :  
 Wherethrough the throng of matter all will dash,  
 Out and abroad.

These points, if thou wilt ponder,  
 Then, with but paltry trouble led along . . .

.            .            .            .            .            .

For one thing after other will grow clear,  
 Nor shall the blind night rob thee of the road,  
 To hinder thy gaze on nature's Farthest-forth.  
 Thus things for things shall kindle torches new.



## BOOK II

## SUMMARY

Proem (1-61).

I. Atomic motions (62-332).

- (a) Incessant motion of the atoms (80-141, 308-332).
- (b) Atomic velocity (142-164).
- (c) Motion by gravity (184-215). (165-183 is a fragment.)
- (d) Declination of the atoms (216-293).
- (e) Conservation of matter and motion (294-307).

II. Atomic forms and their combinations (333-729).

- (a) Indefinite number of atomic shapes (333-477).
- (b) But not infinite (478-521).
- (c) Although the atoms of each shape are infinite (522-580).
- (d) Diverse, but not unlimited, combinations of atomic shapes in the unions (581-729).

III. Absence of secondary qualities (colour, odour, sound, heat, sense) among the atoms (730-990).

IV. Infinite worlds, and eternal creation and destruction of worlds (991-1174).

## BOOK II

### PROEM—I-61

'Tis sweet, when, down the mighty main, the winds  
Roll up its waste of waters, from the land  
To watch another's labouring anguish far,  
Not that we joyously delight that man  
Should thus be smitten, but because 'tis sweet  
To mark what evils we ourselves be spared ;  
'Tis sweet, again, to view the mighty strife  
Of armies embattled yonder o'er the plains,  
Ourselves no sharers in the peril ; but naught  
There is more goodly than to hold the high  
Serene plateaus, well fortified by the wise,  
Whence thou may'st look below on other men  
And see them ev'rywhere wand'ring, all dispersed  
In their lone seeking for the road of life ;  
Rivals in genius, or emulous in rank,  
Pressing through days and nights with hugest toil  
For summits of power and mastery of the world.  
O wretched minds of men ! O blinded hearts !  
In how great perils, in what darks of life  
Are spent the human years, however brief !—  
O not to see that nature for herself  
Barks after nothing, save that pain keep off,  
Disjoined from the body, and that mind enjoy  
Delightful feeling, far from care and fear !  
Therefore we see that our corporeal life  
Needs little, altogether, and only such  
As takes the pain away, and can besides  
Strew underneath some number of delights.

More grateful 'tis at times (for nature craves  
 No artifice nor luxury), if forsooth  
 There be no golden images of boys  
 Along the halls, with right hands holding out  
 The lamps ablaze, the lights for evening feasts,  
 And if the house doth glitter not with gold  
 Nor gleam with silver, and to the lyre resound  
 No fretted and gilded ceilings overhead,  
 Yet still to lounge with friends in the soft grass  
 Beside a river of water, underneath  
 A big tree's boughs, and merrily to refresh  
 Our frames, with no vast outlay—most of all  
 If the weather is laughing and the times of the year  
 Besprinkle the green of the grass around with flowers.  
 Nor yet the quicker will hot fevers go,  
 If on a pictured tapestry thou toss,  
 Or purple robe, than if 'tis thine to lie  
 Upon the poor man's bedding. Wherefore, since  
 Treasure, nor rank, nor glory of a reign  
 Avail us naught for this our body, thus  
 Reckon them likewise nothing for the mind :  
 Save then perchance, when thou beholdest forth  
 Thy legions swarming round the Field of Mars,  
 Rousing a mimic warfare—either side  
 Strengthened with large auxiliaries and horse,  
 Alike equipped with arms, alike inspired ;  
 Or save when also thou beholdest forth  
 Thy fleets to swarm, deploying down the sea :  
 For then, by such bright circumstance abashed,  
 Religion pales and flees thy mind ; O then  
 The fears of death leave heart so free of care.  
 But if we note how all this pomp at last  
 Is but a drollery and a mocking sport,  
 And of a truth man's dread, with cares at heels,  
 Dreads not these sounds of arms, these savage swords,

But among kings and lords of all the world  
 Mingles undaunted, nor is overawed  
 By gleam of gold nor by the splendour bright  
 Of purple robe, canst thou then doubt that this  
 Is aught, but power of thinking?—when, besides  
 The whole of life but labours in the dark.  
 For just as children tremble and fear all  
 In the viewless dark, so even we at times  
 Dread in the light so many things that be  
 No whit more fearsome than what children feign,  
 Shuddering, will be upon them in the dark.  
 This terror then, this darkness of the mind,  
 Not sunrise with its flaring spokes of light,  
 Nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse,  
 But only nature's aspect and her law.

#### ATOMIC MOTIONS—62-332

Now come : I will untangle for thy steps  
 Now by what motions the begetting bodies  
 Of the world-stuff beget the varied world,  
 And then forever resolve it when begot,  
 And by what force they are constrained to this,  
 And what the speed appointed unto them  
 Wherewith to travel down the vast inane :  
 Do thou remember to yield thee to my words.  
 For truly matter coheres not, crowds not tight,  
 ↪ Since we behold each thing to wane away,  
 And we observe how all flows on and off,  
 As 'twere, with age-old time, and from our eyes  
 How eld withdraws each object at the end,  
 Albeit the sum is seen to bide the same,  
 Unharm'd, because these motes that leave each thing  
 Diminish what they part from, but endow  
 With increase those to which in turn they come,

Constraining these to wither in old age,  
 And those to flower at the prime (and yet  
 9 2 Biding not long among them). Thus the sum  
 Forever is replenished, and we live  
 As mortals by eternal give and take.  
 The nations wax, the nations wane away ;  
 In a brief space the generations pass,  
 And like to runners hand the lamp of life  
 One unto other.

But if thou believe  
 That the primordial germs of things can stop,  
 And in their stopping give new motions birth,  
 Afar thou wanderest from the road of truth.  
 10 For since they wander through the void inane,  
 All the primordial germs of things must needs  
 Be borne along, either by weight their own,  
 Or haply by another's blow without.  
 For, when, in their incessancy so oft  
 They meet and clash, it comes to pass amain  
 They leap asunder, face to face : not strange—  
 Being most hard, and solid in their weights,  
 And naught opposing motion, from behind.  
 And that more clearly thou perceive how all  
 These mites of matter are darted round about,  
 Recall to mind how nowhere in the sum  
 Of All exists a bottom,—nowhere is  
 A realm of rest for primal bodies ; since  
 (As amply shown and proved by reason sure)  
 Space has no bound nor measure, and extends  
 Unmetered forth in all directions round.  
 Since this stands certain, thus 'tis out of doubt  
 No rest is rendered to the primal bodies  
 Along the unfathomable inane ; but rather,  
 11 Inveterately plied by motions mixed,  
 Some, at their jamming, bound aback and leave

Huge gaps between, and some from off the blow  
Are hurried about with spaces small between.  
And all which, brought together with slight gaps,  
In more condensed union bound aback,  
Linked by their own all inter-tangled shapes,—  
These form the irrefragable roots of rocks  
And the brute bulks of iron, and what else  
Is of their kind. . . .

✓ The rest leap far asunder, far recoil,  
Leaving huge gaps between : and these supply  
For us thin air and splendour-lights of the sun.  
And many besides wander the mighty void—  
Cast back from unions of existing things,  
Nowhere accepted in the universe,  
And nowise linked in motions to the rest.  
And of this fact (as I record it here)  
An image, a type goes on before our eyes  
Present each moment ; for behold whenever  
✓ The sun's light and the rays, let in, pour down  
Across dark halls of houses : thou wilt see  
The many mites in many a manner mixed  
Amid a void in the very light of the rays,  
And battling on, as in eternal strife,  
And in battalions contending without halt,  
In meetings, partings, harried up and down.  
From this thou mayest conjecture of what sort  
The ceaseless tossing of primordial seeds  
Amid the mightier void—at least so far  
✓ As small affair can for a vaster serve,  
And by example put thee on the spoor  
Of knowledge. For this reason too 'tis fit  
Thou turn thy mind the more unto these bodies  
Which here are witnessed tumbling in the light :  
Namely, because such tumblings are a sign  
That motions also of the primal stuff

Secret and viewless lurk beneath, behind.  
 For thou wilt mark here many a speck, impelled  
 By viewless blows, to change its little course,  
 And beaten backwards to return again,  
 Hither and thither in all directions round.  
 Lo, all their shifting movement is of old,  
 From the primeval atoms ; for the same  
 Primordial seeds of things first move of self,  
 And then those bodies built of unions small  
 And nearest, as it were, unto the powers  
 Of the primeval atoms, are stirred up  
 By impulse of those atoms' unseen blows,  
 And these thereafter goad the next in size :  
 Thus motion ascends from the primevals on,  
 And stage by stage emerges to our sense,  
 Until those objects also move which we  
 Can mark in sunbeams, though it not appears  
 What blows do urge them.

Herein wonder not

How 'tis that, while the seeds of things are all  
 Moving forever, the sum yet seems to stand  
 Supremely still, except in cases where  
 A thing shows motion of its frame as whole.  
 For far beneath the ken of senses lies  
 -The nature of those ultimates of the world ;  
 And so, since those themselves thou canst not see,  
 Their motion also must they veil from men—  
 For mark, indeed, how things we *can* see, oft  
 Yet hide their motions, when afar from us  
 Along the distant landscape. Often thus,  
 Upon a hillside will the woolly flocks  
 Be cropping their goodly food and creeping about  
 Whither the summons of the grass, begemmed  
 With the fresh dew, is calling, and the lambs,  
 -Well filled, are frisking, locking horns in sport :



Yet all for us seem blurred and blent afar—  
A glint of white at rest on a green hill.  
Again, when mighty legions, marching round,  
Fill all the quarters of the plains below,  
Rousing a mimic warfare, there the sheen  
Shoots up the sky, and all the fields about  
Glitter with brass, and from beneath, a sound  
Goes forth from feet of stalwart soldiery,  
And mountain walls, smote by the shouting, send  
The voices onward to the stars of heaven,  
And hither and thither darts the cavalry,  
And of a sudden down the midmost fields  
Charges with onset stout enough to rock  
The solid earth : and yet some post there is  
Up the high mountains, viewed from which they seem  
To stand—a gleam at rest along the plains.

Now what the speed to matter's atoms given  
Thou mayest in few, my Memmius, learn from this :  
When first the dawn is sprinkling with new light  
The lands, and all the breed of birds abroad  
Flit round the trackless forests, with liquid notes  
Filling the regions along the mellow air,  
We see 'tis forthwith manifest to man  
How suddenly the risen sun is wont  
At such an hour to overspread and clothe  
The whole with its own splendour ; but the sun's  
Warm exhalations and this sérene light  
Travel not down an empty void ; and thus  
They are compelled more slowly to advance,  
Whilst, as it were, they cleave the waves of air ;  
Nor one by one travel these particles  
Of the warm exhalations, but are all  
Entangled and enmassed, whereby at once  
Each is restrained by each, and from without  
Checked, till compelled more slowly to advance.

But the primordial atoms with their old  
 Simple solidity, when forth they travel  
 Along the empty void, all undelayed  
 By aught outside them there, and they, each one  
 Being one unit from nature of its parts,  
 Are borne to that one place on which they strive  
 Still to lay hold, must then, beyond a doubt,  
 Outstrip in speed, and be more swiftly borne  
 Than light of sun, and over regions rush,  
 Of space much vaster, in the self-same time  
 The sun's effulgence widens round the sky.

Nor to pursue the atoms one by one,  
 To see the law whereby each thing goes on.  
 But *some* men, ignorant of matter, think,  
 Opposing this, that not without the gods,  
 In such adjustment to our human ways,  
 Can nature change the seasons of the years,  
 And bring to birth the grains and all of else  
 To which divine Delight, the guide of life,  
 Persuades mortality and leads it on,  
 That, through her artful blandishments of love,  
 It propagate the generations still,  
 Lest humankind should perish. When they feign  
 That gods have stablished all things but for man,  
 They seem in all ways mightily to lapse  
 From reason's truth : for ev'n if ne'er I knew  
 What seeds primordial are, yet would I dare  
 This to affirm, ev'n from deep judgment based  
 Upon the ways and conduct of the skies—  
 This to maintain by many a fact besides—  
 That in no wise the nature of the world  
 For us was builded by a power divine—  
 So great the faults it stands encumbered with :  
 The which, my Memmius, later on, for thee

We will clear up. Now as to what remains  
Concerning motions we'll unfold our thought.

Now is the place, meseems, in these affairs  
To prove for thee this too : nothing corporeal  
Of its own force can e'er be upward borne,  
Or upward go—nor let the bodies of flames  
Deceive thee here : for they engendered are  
With urge to upwards, taking thus increase,  
Whereby <sup>1</sup> grow upwards shining grains and trees,  
Though all the weight within them downward bears.  
Nor, when the fires will leap from under round  
The roofs of houses, and swift flame laps up  
Timber and beam, 'tis then to be supposed  
They act of own accord, no force beneath  
To urge them up. 'Tis thus that blood, discharged  
From out our bodies, spurts its jets aloft  
And spatters gore. And hast thou never marked  
With what a force the water will disgorge  
Timber and beam ? The deeper, straight and down,  
We push them in, and, many though we be,  
The more we press with main and toil, the more  
The water vomits up and flings them back,  
That, more than half their length, they there emerge,  
Rebounding. Yet we never doubt, meseems,  
That all the weight within them downward bears  
Through empty void. Well, in like manner, flames  
Ought also to be able, when pressed out,  
Through winds of air to rise aloft, even though  
The weight within them strive to draw them down.  
Hast thou not seen, sweeping so far and high,  
The meteors, midnight flambeaus of the sky,  
How after them they draw long trails of flame  
Wherever Nature gives a thoroughfare ?

<sup>1</sup> "Whereby" : *i.e.*, according to my interpretation, the line refers to the Stoic doctrine that the growth of plants was due to an inner fire.

How stars and constellations drop to earth,  
 Seest not? Nay, too, the sun from peak of heaven  
 Sheds round to every quarter its large heat,  
 And sows the new-ploughed intervalles with light :  
 Thus also sun's heat downward tends to earth.  
 Athwart the rain thou seest the lightning fly ;  
 Now here, now there, bursting from out the clouds,  
 The fires dash zig-zag—and that flaming power  
 Falls likewise down to earth.

In these affairs

We wish thee also well aware of this :  
 The atoms, as their own weight bears them down  
 Plumb through the void, at scarce determined times,  
 In scarce determined places, from their course  
 Decline a little—call it, so to speak,  
 Mere changèd trend. For were it not their wont  
 Thuswise to swerve, down would they fall, each one,  
 Like drops of rain, through the unbottomed void ;  
 And then collisions ne'er could be nor blows  
 Among the primal elements ; and thus  
 Nature would never have created aught.

But, if perchance be any that believe  
 The heavier bodies, as more swiftly borne  
 Plumb down the void, are able from above  
 To strike the lighter, thus engendering blows  
 Able to cause those procreant motions, far  
 From highways of true reason they retire.  
 For whatsoever through the waters fall,  
 Or through thin air, must quicken their descent,  
 Each after its weight—on this account, because  
 Both bulk of water and the subtle air  
 By no means can retard each thing alike,  
 But give more quick before the heavier weight ;  
 But contrariwise the empty void cannot,  
 On any side, at any time, to aught

Oppose resistance, but will ever yield,  
True to its bent of nature. Wherefore all,  
With equal speed, though equal not in weight,  
Must rush, borne downward through the still inane.  
Thus ne'er at all have heavier from above  
Been swift to strike the lighter, gendering strokes  
Which cause those divers motions, by whose means  
Nature transacts her work. And so I say,  
The atoms must a little swerve at times—  
But only, the least, lest we should seem to feign  
Motions oblique, and fact refute us there.  
For this we see forthwith is manifest :  
Whatever the weight, it can't obliquely go,  
Down on its headlong journey from above,  
At least so far as thou canst mark ; but who  
Is there can mark by sense that naught can swerve  
At all aside from off its road's straight line ?

Again, if ev'r all motions are co-linked,  
And from the old ever arise the new  
In fixèd order, and primordial seeds  
Produce not by their swerving some new start  
Of motion to sunder the covenants of fate,  
That cause succeed not cause from everlasting,  
Whence this free will for creatures o'er the lands,  
Whence is it wrested from the fates,—this will  
Whereby we step right forward where desire  
Leads each man on, whereby the same we swerve  
In motions, not as at some fixèd time,  
Nor at some fixèd line of space, but where  
The mind itself has urged ? For out of doubt  
In these affairs 'tis each man's will itself  
That gives the start, and hence throughout our limbs  
Incipient motions are diffused. Again,  
Dost thou not see, when, at a point of time,  
The bars are opened, how the eager strength

Of horses cannot forward break as soon  
As pants their mind to do ? For it behoves  
That all the stock of matter, through the frame,  
Be roused, in order that, through every joint,  
Aroused, it press and follow mind's desire ;  
So thus thou seest initial motion's gendered  
From out the heart, aye, verily, proceeds  
First from the spirit's will, whence at the last  
'Tis given forth through joints and body entire.  
Quite otherwise it is, when forth we move,  
Impelled by a blow of another's mighty powers  
And mighty urge ; for then 'tis clear enough  
All matter of our total body goes,  
Hurried along, against our own desire—  
Until the will has pulled upon the reins  
And checked it back, throughout our members all ;  
At whose arbitrament indeed sometimes  
The stock of matter's forced to change its path,  
Throughout our members and throughout our joints,  
And, after being forward cast, to be  
Reined up, whereat it settles back again.  
So seest thou not, how, though external force  
Drive men before, and often make them move,  
Onward against desire, and headlong snatched,  
Yet is there something in these breasts of ours  
Strong to combat, strong to withstand the same ?—  
Wherefore no less within the primal seeds  
Thou must admit, besides all blows and weight,  
Some other cause of motion, whence derives  
This power in us inborn, of some free act.—  
Since naught from nothing can become, we see.  
For weight prevents all things should come to pass  
Through blows, as 'twere, by some external force ;  
But that man's mind itself in all it does  
Hath not a fixed necessity within,

Nor is not, like a conquered thing, compelled  
To bear and suffer,—*this* state comes to man  
From that slight swervement of the elements  
In no fixed line of space, in no fixed time.

Nor ever was the stock of stuff more crammed,  
Nor ever, again, sundered by bigger gaps :  
For naught gives increase and naught takes away ;  
On which account, just as they move to-day,  
The elemental bodies moved of old  
And shall the same hereafter evermore.  
And what was wont to be begot of old  
Shall be begotten under selfsame terms  
And grow and thrive in power, so far as given  
To each by Nature's changeless, old decrees.  
The sum of things there is no power can change,  
For naught exists outside, to which can flee  
Out of the world matter of any kind,  
Nor forth from which a fresh supply can spring,  
Break in upon the founded world, and change  
Whole nature of things, and turn their motions about.

#### ATOMIC FORMS AND THEIR COMBINATIONS—333-729

Now come, and next hereafter apprehend  
What sorts, how vastly different in form,  
How varied in multitudinous shapes they are—  
These old beginnings of the universe ;  
Not in the sense that only few are furnished  
With one like form, but rather not at all  
In general have they likeness each with each.  
No marvel : since the stock of them's so great  
That there's no end (as I have taught) nor sum,  
They must indeed not one and all be marked  
By equal outline and by shape the same.

Moreover, humankind, and the mute flocks  
Of scaly creatures swimming in the streams,  
And joyous herds around, and all the wild,  
And all the breeds of birds—both those that teem  
In gladsome regions of the water-haunts,  
About the river-banks and springs and pools,  
And those that throng, flitting from tree to tree,  
Through trackless woods—Go, take which one thou wilt,  
In any kind : thou wilt discover still  
Each from the other still unlike in shape.  
Nor in no other wise could offspring know  
Mother, nor mother offspring—which we see  
They yet can do, distinguished one from other,  
No less than human beings, by clear signs.  
Thus oft before fair temples of the gods,  
Beside the incense-burning altars slain,  
Drops down the yearling calf, from out its breast  
Breathing warm streams of blood ; the orphaned mother,  
Ranging meanwhile green woodland pastures round,  
Knows well the footprints, pressed by cloven hoofs,  
With eyes regarding every spot about,  
For sight somewhere of youngling gone from her ;  
And, stopping short, filleth the leafy lanes  
With her complaints ; and oft she seeks again  
Within the stall, pierced by her yearning still.  
Nor tender willows, nor dew-quickenèd grass,  
Nor the loved streams that glide along low banks,  
Can lure her mind and turn the sudden pain ;  
Nor other shapes of calves that graze thereby  
Distract her mind or lighten pain the least—  
So keen her search for something known and hers.  
Moreover, tender kids with bleating throats  
Do know their hornèd dams, and butting lambs  
The flocks of sheep, and thus they patter on,



Unfailingly each to its proper teat,  
As nature intends. Lastly, with any grain,  
Thou'lt see that no one kernel in one kind  
Is so far like another, that there still  
Is not in shapes some difference running through.  
By a like law we see how earth is pied  
With shells and conchs, where, with soft waves, the sea  
Beats on the thirsty sands of curving shores.  
Wherefore again, again, since seeds of things  
Exist by nature, nor were wrought with hands  
After a fixèd pattern of one other,  
They needs must flitter to and fro with shapes  
In types dissimilar to one another.

Easy enough by thought of mind to solve  
Why fires of lightning more can penetrate  
Than these of ours from pitch-pine born on earth.  
For thou canst say lightning's celestial fire,  
So subtle, is formed of figures finer far,  
And passes thus through holes which this our fire,  
Born from the wood, created from the pine,  
Cannot. Again, light passes through the horn  
On the lantern's side, while rain is dashed away.  
And why?—unless those bodies of light should be  
Finer than those of water's genial showers.  
We see how quickly through a colander  
The wines will flow; how, on the other hand,  
The sluggish olive-oil delays: no doubt,  
Because 'tis wrought of elements more large,  
Or else more crook'd and intertangled. Thus  
It comes that the primordials cannot be  
So suddenly sundered one from other, and seep,  
One through each several hole of anything.

And note, besides, that liquor of honey or milk  
Yields in the mouth agreeable taste to tongue,

Whilst nauseous wormwood, pungent centaury,  
With their foul flavour set the lips awry ;  
Thus simple 'tis to see that whatsoever  
Can touch the senses pleasingly are made  
Of smooth and rounded elements, whilst those  
Which seem the bitter and the sharp, are held  
Entwined by elements more crook'd, and so  
Are wont to tear their ways into our senses,  
And rend our body as they enter in.  
In short all good to sense, all bad to touch,  
Being up-built of figures so unlike,  
Are mutually at strife—lest thou suppose  
That the shrill rasping of a squeaking saw  
Consists of elements as smooth as song  
Which, waked by nimble fingers, on the strings  
The sweet musicians fashion ; or suppose  
That same-shaped atoms through men's nostrils pierce  
When foul cadavers burn, as when the stage  
Is with Cilician saffron sprinkled fresh,  
And the altar near exhales Panchaeian scent ;  
Or hold as of like seed the goodly hues  
Of things which feast our eyes, as those which sting  
Against the smarting pupil and draw tears,  
Or show, with gruesome aspect, grim and vile.  
For never a shape which charms our sense was made  
Without some elemental smoothness ; whilst  
Whate'er is harsh and irksome has been framed  
Still with some roughness in its elements.  
Some, too, there are which justly are supposed  
To be nor smooth nor altogether hooked,  
With bended barbs, but slightly angled-out,  
To tickle rather than to wound the sense—  
And of which sort is the salt tartar of wine  
And flavours of the gummed elecampane.  
Again, that glowing fire and icy rime

Are fanged with teeth unlike whereby to sting  
 Our body's sense, the touch of each gives proof.  
 For touch—by sacred majesties of Gods !—  
 Touch is indeed the body's only sense—  
 Be't that something in-from-outward works,  
 Be't that something in the body born  
 Wounds, or delighteth as it passes out  
 Along the procreant paths of Aphrodite ;  
 Or be't the seeds by some collision whirl  
 Disordered in the body and confound  
 By tumult and confusion all the sense—  
 As thou mayst find, if haply with the hand  
 Thyself thou strike thy body's any part.  
 On which account, the elemental forms  
 Must differ widely, as enabled thus  
 To cause diverse sensations.

And, again,

What seems to us the hardened and condensed  
 Must be of atoms among themselves more hooked,  
 Be held compacted deep within, as 'twere  
 By branch-like atoms—of which sort the chief  
 Are diamond stones, despisers of all blows,  
 And stalwart flint and strength of solid iron,  
 And brazen bars, which, budging hard in locks,  
 Do grate and scream. But what are liquid, formed  
 Of fluid body, *they* indeed must be  
 Of elements more smooth and round—because  
 Their globules severally will not cohere :  
 To suck the poppy-seeds from palm of hand  
 Is quite as easy as drinking water down,  
 And they, once struck, roll like unto the same.  
 But that thou seest among the things that flow  
 Some bitter, as the brine of ocean is,  
 Is not the least a marvel . . .  
 For since 'tis fluid, smooth its atoms are

And round, with painful rough ones mixed therein ;  
 Yet need not these be held together *hooked* :  
 In fact, though rough, they're globular besides,  
 Able at once to roll, and rasp the sense.

And that the more thou mayst believe me here,  
 That with smooth elements are mixed the rough  
 (Whence Neptune's salt astringent body comes),

There is a means to separate the twain,  
 And thereupon dividedly to see

How the sweet water, after filtering through  
 So often underground, flows freshened forth  
 Into some hollow ; for it leaves above

The primal germs of nauseating brine,  
 Since cling the rough more readily in earth.

Lastly, whatso thou markest to disperse

Upon the instant—smoke, and cloud, and flame—

Must not (even though not all of smooth and round)

Be yet co-linked with atoms intertwined,

That thus they can, without together cleaving,

So pierce our body and so bore the rocks.

Whatever we see . . .

Given to senses, that thou must perceive

They're not from linked but pointed elements.

The which now having taught, I will go on

To bind thereto a fact to this allied

And drawing from this its proof : these primal germs  
 Vary, yet only with finite tale of shapes.

For were these shapes quite infinite, some seeds  
 Would have a body of infinite increase.

For in one seed, in one small frame of any,

The shapes can't vary from one another much.

Assume, we'll say, that of three minim parts

Consist the primal bodies, or add a few :

When, now, by placing all these parts of one

At top and bottom, changing lefts and rights,

Thou hast with every kind of shift found out  
 What the aspect of shape of its whole body  
 Each new arrangement gives, for what remains,  
 If thou perchance wouldst vary its old shapes,  
 New parts must then be added ; 'twill follow next,  
 If thou perchance wouldst vary still its shapes,  
 That by like logic each arrangement still  
 Requires its increment of other parts.  
 Ergo, an augmentation of its frame  
 Follows upon each novelty of forms.  
 Wherefore, it cannot be thou'lt undertake  
 That seeds have infinite differences in form,  
 Lest thus thou forcest some indeed to be  
 Of an immeasurable immensity—  
 Which I have taught above cannot be proved.

And now for thee barbaric robes, and gleam  
 Of Meliboean purple, touched with dye  
 Of the Thessalian shell. . . .  
 The peacock's golden generations, stained  
 With spotted gaieties, would lie o'erthrown  
 By some new colour of new things more bright ;  
 The odour of myrrh and savours of honey despised ;  
 The swan's old lyric, and Apollo's hymns,  
 Once modulated on the many chords,  
 Would likewise sink o'er mastered and be mute :  
 For, lo, a somewhat, finer than the rest,  
 Would be arising evermore. So, too,  
 Into some baser part might all retire,  
 Even as we said to better might they come :  
 For, lo, a somewhat, loathlier than the rest  
 To nostrils, ears, and eyes, and taste of tongue,  
 Would then, by reasoning reversed, be there.  
 Since 'tis not so, but unto things are given  
 Their fixed limitations which do bound

Their sum on either side, 't must be confessed  
 That matter, too, by finite tale of shapes  
 Does differ. Again, from earth's midsummer heats  
 Unto the icy hoar-frosts of the year  
 The forward path is fixed, and by like law  
 O'ertravelled backwards at the dawn of spring.  
 For each degree of hot, and each of cold,  
 And the half-warm, all filling up the sum  
 In due progression, lie, my Memmius, there  
 Betwixt the two extremes : the things create  
 Must differ, therefore, by a finite change,  
 Since at each end marked off they ever are  
 By fixèd point—on one side plagued by flames  
 And on the other by congealing frosts.

The which now having taught, I will go on  
 To bind thereto a fact to this allied  
 And drawing from this its proof : those primal germs  
 Which have been fashioned all of one like shape  
 Are infinite in tale ; for, since the forms  
 Themselves are finite in divergences,  
 Then those which are alike will have to be  
 Infinite, else the sum of stuff remains  
 A finite—what I've proved is not the fact,  
 Showing in verse how corpuscles of stuff,  
 From everlasting and to-day the same,  
 Uphold the sum of things, all sides around  
 By old succession of unending blows.  
 For though thou view'st some beasts to be more rare,  
 And mark'st in them a less prolific stock,  
 Yet in another region, in lands remote,  
 That kind abounding may make up the count ;  
 Even as we mark among the four-foot kind  
 Snake-handed elephants, whose thousands wall  
 With ivory ramparts India about,  
 That her interiors cannot entered be—

So big her count of brutes of which we see  
Such few examples. Or suppose, besides,  
We feign some thing, one of its kind and sole  
With body born, to which is nothing like  
In all the lands : yet now unless shall be  
An infinite count of matter out of which  
Thus to conceive and bring it forth to life,  
It cannot be created and—what's more—  
It cannot take its food and get increase.  
Yea, if through all the world in finite tale  
Be tossed the procreant bodies of one thing,  
Whence, then, and where, in what mode, by what power,  
Shall they to meeting come together there,  
In such vast ocean of matter and tumult strange ?—  
No means they have of joining into one.  
But, just as, after mighty ship-wrecks piled,  
The mighty main is wont to scatter wide  
The rowers' banks, the ribs, the yards, the prow,  
The masts and swimming oars, so that afar  
Along all shores of lands are seen afloat  
The carven fragments of the rended poop,  
Giving a lesson to mortality  
To shun the ambush of the faithless main,  
The violence and the guile, and trust it not  
At any hour, however much may smile  
The crafty enticements of the placid deep :  
Exactly thus, if once thou holdest true  
That certain seeds are finite in their tale,  
The various tides of matter, then, must needs  
Scatter them flung throughout the ages all,  
So that not ever can they join, as driven  
Together into union, nor remain  
In union, nor with increment can grow—  
But facts in proof are manifest for each :  
Things *can* be both begotten and increase.

'Tis therefore manifest that primal germs,  
 Are infinite in any class thou wilt—  
 From whence is furnished matter for all things.

Nor can those motions that bring death prevail  
 Forever, nor eternally entomb  
 The welfare of the world ; nor, further, can  
 Those motions that give birth to things and growth  
 Keep them forever when created there.  
 Thus the long war, from everlasting waged,  
 With equal strife among the elements  
 Goes on and on. Now here, now there, prevail  
 The vital forces of the world—or fall.  
 Mixed with the funeral is the wildered wail  
 Of infants coming to the shores of light :  
 No night a day, no dawn a night hath followed  
 That heard not, mingling with the small birth-cries,  
 The wild laments, companions old of death  
 And the black rites.

This, too, in these affairs  
 'Tis fit thou hold well sealed, and keep consigned  
 With no forgetting brain : nothing there is  
 Whose nature is apparent out of hand  
 That of one kind of elements consists—  
 Nothing there is that's not of mixèd seed.  
 And whatsoe'er possesses in itself  
 More largely many powers and properties  
 Shows thus that here within itself there are  
 The largest number of kinds and differing shapes  
 Of elements. And, chief of all, the earth  
 Hath in herself first bodies whence the springs,  
 Rolling chill waters, renew forevermore  
 The unmeasured main ; hath whence the fires arise—  
 For burns in many a spot her flamèd crust,  
 Whilst the impetuous Aetna raves indeed  
 From more profounder fires—and she, again,



Hath in herself the seed whence she can raise  
The shining grains and gladsome trees for men ;  
Whence, also, rivers, fronds, and gladsome pastures  
Can she supply for mountain-roaming beasts.  
Wherefore great mother of gods, and mother of beasts,  
And parent of man hath she alone been named.

Her hymned the old and learnèd bards of Greece

Seated in chariot o'er the realms of air  
To drive her team of lions, teaching thus  
That the great earth hangs poised and cannot lie  
Resting on other earth. Unto her car  
They've yoked the wild beasts, since a progeny,  
However savage, must be tamed and chid  
By care of parents. They have girt about  
With turret-crown the summit of her head,  
Since, fortified in her goodly strongholds high,  
'Tis she sustains the cities ; now, adorned  
With that same token, to-day is carried forth,  
With solemn awe through many a mighty land,  
The image of that mother, the divine.  
Her the wide nations, after antique rite,  
Do name Idaean Mother, giving her  
Escort of Phrygian bands, since first, they say,  
From out those regions 'twas that grain began  
Through all the world. To her do they assign  
The Galli, the emasculate, since thus  
They wish to show that men who violate  
The majesty of the mother and have proved  
Ingrate to parents are to be adjudged  
Unfit to give unto the shores of light  
A living progeny. The Galli come :  
And hollow cymbals, tight-skinned tambourines  
Resound around to bangings of their hands ;  
The fierce horns threaten with a raucous bray ;

The tubèd pipe excites their maddened minds  
 In Phrygian measures ; they bear before them knives,<sup>1</sup>  
 Wild emblems of their frenzy, which have power  
 The rabble's ingrate heads and impious hearts  
 To panic with terror of the goddess' might.  
 And so, when through the mighty cities borne,  
 She blesses man with salutations mute,  
 They strew the highway of her journeyings  
 With coin of brass and silver, gifting her  
 With alms and largesse, and shower her and shade  
 With flowers of roses falling like the snow  
 Upon the Mother and her companion-bands.  
 Here is an armèd troop, the which by Greeks  
 Are called the Phrygian Curètes. Since  
 Haply among themselves they use to play  
 In games of arms and leap in measure round  
 With bloody mirth and by their nodding shake  
 The terrorizing crests upon their heads,  
 This is the armèd troop that represents  
 The arm'd Dictæan Curètes, who, in Crete,  
 As runs the story, whilom did out-drown  
 That infant cry of Zeus, what time their band,  
 Young boys, in a swift dance around the boy,  
 To measured step beat with the brass on brass,  
 That Saturn might not get him for his jaws,  
 And give its mother an eternal wound  
 Along her heart. And 'tis on this account  
 That armèd they escort the mighty Mother,  
 Or else because they signify by this  
 That she, the goddess, teaches men to be  
 Eager with armèd valour to defend  
 Their motherland, and ready to stand forth,  
 The guard and glory of their parents' years.  
 A tale, however beautifully wrought,

<sup>1</sup> Used for self-castration.

That's wide of reason by a long remove :  
For all the gods must of themselves enjoy  
Immortal aeons and supreme repose,  
Withdrawn from our affairs, detached, afar :  
Immune from peril and immune from pain,  
Themselves abounding in riches of their own,  
Needing not us, they are not touched by wrath,  
They are not taken by service or by gift.  
Truly is earth insensate for all time ;  
But, by obtaining germs of many things,  
In many a way she brings the many forth  
Into the light of sun. And here, whoso  
Decides to call the ocean Neptune, or  
The grain-crop Ceres, and prefers to abuse  
The name of Bacchus rather than pronounce  
The liquor's proper designation, him  
Let us permit to go on calling earth  
Mother of Gods, if only he will spare  
To taint his soul with foul religion.

So, too, the woolly flocks, and hornèd kine,  
And brood of battle-eager horses, grazing  
Often together along one grassy plain,  
Under the cope of one blue sky, and slaking  
From out one stream of water each its thirst,  
All live their lives with face and form unlike,  
Keeping the parents' nature, parents' habits,  
Which, kind by kind, through ages they repeat.  
So great in any sort of herb thou wilt,  
So great again in any river of earth  
Are the distinct diversities of matter.  
Hence, further, every creature—any one  
From out them all—compounded is the same  
Of bones, blood, veins, heat, moisture, flesh, and thews—  
All differing vastly in their forms, and built  
Of elements dissimilar in shape.

Again, all things by fire consumed ablaze,  
 Within their frame lay up, if naught besides,  
 At least those atoms whence derives their power  
 To throw forth fire and send out light from under,  
 To shoot the sparks and scatter embers wide.  
 If, with like reasoning of mind, all else  
 Thou traverse through, thou wilt discover thus  
 That in their frame the seeds of many things  
 They hide, and divers shapes of seeds contain.  
 Further, thou markest much, to which are given  
 Along together colour and flavour and smell,  
 Among which, chief, are most burnt offerings.

Thus must they be of divers shapes composed.  
 A smell of scorching enters in our frame  
 Where the bright colour from the dye goes not ;  
 And colour in one way, flavour in quite another  
 Works inward to our senses—so mayst see  
 They differ too in elemental shapes.  
 Thus unlike forms into one mass combine,  
 And things exist by inter-mixèd seed.

But still 't must not be thought that in all ways  
 All things can be conjoined ; for then wouldst view  
 Portents begot about thee every side :  
 Hulks of mankind half brute astarting up,  
 At times big branches sprouting from man's trunk,  
 Limbs of a sea-beast to a land-beast knit,  
 And nature along the all-producing earth  
 Feeding those dire Chimaeras breathing flame  
 From hideous jaws—Of which 'tis simple fact  
 That none have been begot ; because we see  
 All are from fixèd seed and fixèd dam  
 Engendered and so function as to keep  
 Throughout their growth their own ancestral type.  
 This happens surely by a fixèd law :

For from all food-stuff, when once eaten down,  
 Go sundered atoms, suited to each creature,  
 Throughout their bodies, and, conjoining there,  
 Produce the proper motions ; but we see  
 How, contrariwise, nature upon the ground  
 Throws off those foreign to their frame ; and many  
 With viewless bodies from their bodies fly,  
 By blows impelled—those impotent to join  
 To any part, or, when inside, to accord  
 And to take on the vital motions there.  
 But think not, haply, living forms alone  
 Are bound by *these* laws : they distinguish all.

For just as all things of creation are,  
 In their whole nature, each to each unlike,  
 So must their atoms be in shape unlike—  
 Not since few only are fashioned of like form,  
 But since they <sup>1</sup> all, as general rule, are not  
 The same as all. Nay, here in these our verses,  
 Elements many, common to many words,  
 Thou seest, though yet 'tis needful to confess  
 The words and verses differ, each from each,  
 Compounded out of different elements—  
 Not since few only, as common letters, run  
 Through all the words, or no two words are made,  
 One and the other, from *all* like elements,  
 But since they <sup>2</sup> all, as general rule, are not  
 The same as all. Thus, too, in other things,  
 Whilst many germs common to many things  
 There are, yet they,<sup>1</sup> combined among themselves,  
 Can form new wholes to others quite unlike.  
 Thus fairly one may say that humankind,  
 The grains, the gladsome trees, are all made up  
 Of different atoms. Further, since the seeds

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* atoms.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* the letters.

Are different, difference must there also be  
 In intervening spaces, thoroughfares,  
 Connections, weights, blows, clashing, motions, all  
 Which not alone distinguish living forms,  
 But sunder earth's whole ocean from the lands,  
 And hold all heaven from the lands away.

ABSENCE OF SECONDARY QUALITIES—730-990

Now come, this wisdom by my sweet toil sought  
 Look thou perceive, lest haply thou shouldst guess  
 That the white objects shining to thine eyes  
 Are gendered of white atoms, or the black  
 Of a black seed ; or yet believe that aught  
 That's steeped in any hue should take its dye  
 From bits of matter tinct with hue the same.  
 For matter's bodies own no hue the least—  
 Or like to objects or, again, unlike.  
 But, if perchance it seem to thee that mind  
 Itself can dart no influence of its own  
 Into these bodies, wide thou wand'rest off.  
 For since the blind-born, who have ne'er surveyed  
 The light of sun, yet recognise by touch  
 Things that from birth had ne'er a hue for them,  
 'Tis thine to know that bodies can be brought  
 No less unto the ken of *our* minds too,  
 Though yet those bodies with no dye be smeared.  
 Again, ourselves whatever in the dark  
 We touch, the same we do not find to be  
 Tinctured with any colour.

Now that here  
 I win the argument, I next will teach

Now, every colour changes, none except,  
 And every . . .

Which the primordials ought nowise to do.  
 Since an immutable somewhat must remain,  
 Lest all things utterly be brought to naught.  
 For change of anything from out its bounds  
 Means instant death of that which was before.  
 Wherefore be mindful not to stain with colour  
 The seeds of things, lest things return for thee  
 All utterly to naught.

<sup>1</sup> But now, if seeds

Receive no property of colour, and yet  
 Be still endowed with variable forms  
 From which all kinds of colours they beget  
 And vary (by reason that ever it matters much  
 With *what* seeds, and in *what* positions joined,  
 And *what* the motions that they give and get),  
 Forthwith most easily thou mayst devise  
 Why what was black of hue an hour ago  
 Can of a sudden like the marble gleam,—  
 As ocean, when the high winds have upheaved  
 Its level plains, is changed to hoary waves  
 Of marble whiteness : for, thou mayst declare,  
 That, when the thing we often see as black  
 Is in its matter then commixed anew,  
 Some atoms rearranged, and some withdrawn,  
 And added some, 'tis seen forthwith to turn  
 Glowing and white. But if of azure seeds  
 Consist the level waters of the deep,  
 They could in nowise whiten : for however  
 Thou shakest azure seeds, the same can never  
 Pass into marble hue. But, if the seeds—  
 Which thus produce the ocean's one pure sheen—  
 Be now with one hue, now another dyed,  
 As oft from alien forms and divers shapes  
 A cube's produced all uniform in shape,

<sup>1</sup> A dreadful paragraph. I have interpreted it according to my lights.

'Twould be but natural, even as in the cube  
 We see the forms to be dissimilar,  
 That thus we'd see in brightness of the deep  
 (Or in whatever one pure sheen thou wilt)  
 Colours diverse and all dissimilar.  
 Besides, the unlike shapes don't thwart the least  
 The whole in being externally a cube ;  
 But differing hues of things *do* block and keep  
 The whole from being of one resultant hue.  
 Then, too, the reason which entices us  
 At times to attribute colour to the seeds  
 Falls quite to pieces, since white things are not  
 Create from white things, nor are black from black,  
 But evermore they are create from things  
 Of divers colours. Verily, the white  
 Will rise more readily, is sooner born  
 Out of no colour, than of black or aught  
 Which stands in hostile opposition thus.

Besides, since colours cannot be, sans light,  
 And the primordials come not forth to light,  
 'Tis thine to know they are not clothed with colour—  
 Truly, what kind of colour could there be  
 In the viewless dark ? Nay, in the light itself  
 A colour changes, gleaming variedly,  
 When smote by vertical or slanting ray.  
 Thus in the sunlight shows the down of doves  
 That circles, garlanding, the nape and throat :  
 Now it is ruddy with a bright gold-bronze,  
 Now, by a strange sensation it becomes  
 Green-emerald blended with the coral-red.  
 The peacock's tail, filled with the copious light,  
 Changes its colours likewise, when it turns.  
 Wherefore, since by some blow of light begot,  
 Without such blow these colours can't become.

And since the pupil of the eye receives



Within itself one kind of blow, when said  
 To feel a white hue, then another kind,  
 When feeling a black or any other hue,  
 And since it matters nothing with what hue  
 The things thou touchest be perchance endowed,  
 But rather with what sort of shape equipped,  
 'Tis thine to know the atoms need not colour,  
 But render forth sensations, as of touch,  
 That vary with their varied forms.

Besides,

Since special shapes have not a special colour,  
 And all formations of the primal germs  
 Can be of any sheen thou wilt, why, then,  
 Are not those objects which are of them made  
 Suffused, each kind, with colours of every kind ?  
 For then 'twere meet that ravens, as they fly,  
 Should dartle from white pinions a white sheen,  
 Or swans turn black from seed of black, or be  
 Of any single varied dye thou wilt.

Again, the more an object's rent to bits,  
 The more thou seest its colour fade away  
 Little by little till 'tis quite extinct ;  
 As happens when the gaudy linen's picked  
 Shred after shred away : the purple there,  
 Phoenician red, most brilliant of all dyes,  
 Is lost asunder, ravelled thread by thread ;  
 Hence canst perceive the fragments die away  
 From out their colour, long ere they depart  
 Back to the old primordials of things.  
 And, last, since thou concedest not all bodies  
 Send out a voice or smell, it happens thus  
 That not to all thou givest sounds and smells.  
 So, too, since we behold not all with eyes,  
 'Tis thine to know some things there are as much  
 Orphaned of colour, as others without smell,

And reft of sound ; and those the mind alert  
 No less can apprehend than it can mark  
 The things that lack some other qualities.

But think not haply that the primal bodies  
 Remain despoiled alone of colour : so,  
 Are they from warmth dissevered and from cold  
 And from hot exhalations ; and they move,  
 Both sterile of sound and dry of juice ; and throw  
 Not any odour from their proper bodies.  
 Just as, when undertaking to prepare  
 A liquid balm of myrrh and marjoram,  
 And flower of nard, which to our nostrils breathes  
 Odour of nectar, first of all behooves  
 Thou seek, as far as find thou may and can,  
 The inodorous olive-oil (which never sends  
 One whiff of scent to nostrils), that it may  
 The least debauch and ruin with sharp tang  
 The odorous essence with its body mixed  
 And in it seethed. And on the same account  
 The primal germs of things must not be thought  
 To furnish colour in begetting things,  
 Nor sound, since pow'rless they to send forth aught  
 From out themselves, nor any flavour, too,  
 Nor cold, nor exhalation hot or warm.

The rest ; yet since these things are mortal all—  
 The pliant mortal, with a body soft ;  
 The brittle mortal, with a crumbling frame ;  
 The hollow with a porous—all must be  
 Disjoinèd from the primal elements,  
 If still we wish under the world to lay  
 Immortal ground-works, whereupon may rest  
 The sum of weal and safety, lest for thee  
 All things return to nothing utterly.

Now, too : whate'er we see possessing sense

Must yet confessedly be established all  
 From elements insensate. And those signs,  
 So clear to all and witnessed out of hand,  
 Do not refute this dictum nor oppose ;  
 But rather themselves do lead us by the hand,  
 Compelling belief that living things are born  
 Of elements insensate, as I say.

Sooth, we may see from out the stinking dung  
 Live worms spring up, when, after soaking rains,  
 The drenched earth rots ; and all things change the  
 same :

Lo, change the rivers, the fronds, the gladsome pastures  
 Into the cattle, the cattle their nature change  
 Into our bodies, and from our body, oft  
 Grow strong the powers and bodies of wild beasts  
 And mighty-wingèd birds. Thus nature changes  
 All foods to living frames, and procreates  
 From *them* the senses of live creatures all,  
 In manner about as she uncoils in flames  
 Dry logs of wood and turns them all to fire.  
 And seest not, therefore, how it matters much  
 After what order are set the primal germs,  
 And with what other germs they all are mixed,  
 And what the motions that they give and get ?

But now, what is't that strikes thy sceptic mind,  
 Constraining thee to sundry arguments  
 Against belief that from insensate germs  
 The sensible is gendered ?—Verily,  
 'Tis this : that liquids, earth, and wood, though mixed,  
 Are yet unable to gender vital sense.  
 And, therefore, 'twill be well in these affairs  
 This to remember : that I have not said  
 Senses are born, under conditions all,  
 From all things absolutely which create  
 Objects that feel ; but much it matters here

Firstly, how small the seeds which thus compose  
 The feeling thing, then, with what shapes endowed,  
 And lastly what they in *positions* be,  
 In motions, in arrangements. Of which facts  
 Naught we perceive in logs of wood and clods ;  
 And yet even these, when sodden by the rains,  
 Give birth to wormy grubs, because the bodies  
 Of matter, from their old arrangements stirred  
 By the new factor, then combine anew  
 In such a way as genders living things.

Next, they who deem that feeling objects can  
 From feeling objects be create, and these,  
 In turn, from others that are wont to feel

When soft they make them ; for all sense is linked  
 With flesh, and thews, and veins—and such, we see,  
 Are fashioned soft and of a mortal frame.  
 Yet be't that these can last forever on :  
 They'll have the sense that's proper to a part,  
 Or else be judged to have a sense the same  
 As that within live creatures as a whole.  
 But of themselves those parts can never feel,  
 For all the sense in every member back  
 To something else <sup>1</sup> refers—a severed hand,  
 Or any other member of our frame,  
 Itself alone cannot support sensation.  
 It thus remains they must resemble, then,  
 Live creatures as a whole, to have the power  
 Of feeling sensation concordant in each part  
 With the vital sense ; and so they're bound to feel  
 The things we feel exactly as do we.  
 If such the case, how, then, can they be named  
 The primal germs of things, and how avoid  
 The highways of destruction ?—since they be

<sup>1</sup> Apparently the mind.

Mere living things and living things be all  
One and the same with mortal. Grant they could,  
Yet by their meetings and their unions all,  
Naught would result, indeed, besides a throng  
And hurly-burly all of living things—  
Precisely as men, and cattle, and wild beasts,  
By mere conglomeration each with each  
Can still beget not anything of new.  
But if by chance they lose, inside a body,  
Their own sense and another sense take on,  
What, then, avails it to assign them that  
Which is withdrawn thereafter? And besides,  
To touch on proof that we pronounced before,  
Just as we see the eggs of feathered fowls  
To change to living chicks, and swarming worms  
To bubble forth when from the soaking rains  
The earth is sodden, sure, sensations all  
Can out of non-sensations be begot.

But if one say that sense can so far rise  
From non-sense by mutation, or because  
Brought forth as by a certain sort of birth,  
'Twill serve to render plain to him and prove  
There is no birth, unless there be before  
Some formed union of the elements,  
Nor any change, unless they be unite.

In first place, senses can't in body be  
Before its living nature's been begot,—  
Since all its stuff, in faith, is held dispersed  
About through rivers, air, and earth, and all  
That is from earth created, nor has met  
In combination, and, in proper mode,  
Conjoined into those vital motions which  
Kindle the all-perceiving senses—they  
That keep and guard each living thing soever.

Again, a blow beyond its nature's strength

Shatters forthwith each living thing soe'er,  
 And on it goes confounding all the sense  
 Of body and mind. For of the primal germs  
 Are loosed their old arrangements, and, throughout,  
 The vital motions blocked,—until the stuff,  
 Shaken profoundly through the frame entire,  
 Undoes the vital knots of soul from body  
 And throws that soul, to outward wide-dispersed,  
 Through all the pores. For what may we surmise  
 A blow inflicted can achieve besides  
 Shaking asunder and loosening all apart ?  
 It happens also, when less sharp the blow,  
 The vital motions which are left are wont  
 Oft to win out—win out, and stop and still  
 The uncouth tumults gendered by the blow,  
 And call each part to its own courses back,  
 And shake away the motion of death which now  
 Begins its own dominion in the body,  
 And kindle anew the senses almost gone.  
 For by what other means could they the more  
 Collect their powers of thought and turn again  
 From very doorways of destruction  
 Back unto life, rather than pass whereto  
 They be already well-nigh sped and so  
 Pass quite away ?

Again, since pain is there  
 Where bodies of matter, by some force stirred up,  
 Through vitals and through joints, within their seats  
 Quiver and quake inside, but soft delight,  
 When they remove unto their place again :  
 'Tis thine to know the primal germs can be  
 Assaulted by no pain, nor from themselves  
 Take no delight ; because indeed they are  
 Not made of any bodies of first things,  
 Under whose strange new motions they might ache

Or pluck the fruit of any dear new sweet.  
And so they must be furnished with no sense.

Once more, if thus, that every living thing  
May have sensation, needful 'tis to assign  
Sense also to its elements, what then  
Of those fixed elements from which mankind  
Hath been, by their peculiar virtue, formed ?  
Of verity, they'll laugh aloud, like men,  
Shaken asunder by a spasm of mirth,  
Or sprinkle with dewy tear-drops cheeks and chins,  
And have the cunning hardihood to say  
Much on the composition of the world,  
And in their turn inquire what elements  
They have themselves,—since, thus the same in kind  
As a whole mortal creature, even they  
Must also be from other elements,  
And then those others from others evermore—  
So that thou daarest nowhere make a stop.  
Oho, I'll follow thee until thou grant  
The seed (which here thou say'st speaks, laughs, and  
thinks)  
Is yet derivèd out of other seeds  
Which in their turn are doing just the same.  
But if we see what raving nonsense this,  
And that a man may laugh, though not, forsooth,  
Compounded out of laughing elements,  
And think and utter reason with learn'd speech,  
Though not himself compounded, for a fact,  
Of sapient seeds and eloquent, why, then,  
Cannot those things which we perceive to have  
Their own sensation be composed as well  
Of intermixèd seeds quite void of sense ?

## INFINITE WORLDS—991-1174

Once more, we all from seed celestial spring,  
 To all is that same father, from whom earth,  
 The fostering mother, as she takes the drops  
 Of liquid moisture, pregnant bears her broods—  
 The shining grains, and gladsome shrubs and trees,  
 And bears the human race and of the wild  
 The generations all, the while she yields  
 The foods wherewith all feed their frames and lead  
 The genial life and propagate their kind ;  
 Wherefore she owneth that maternal name,  
 By old desert. What was before from earth,  
 The same in earth sinks back, and what was sent  
 From shores of ether, that, returning home,  
 The vaults of sky receive. Nor thus doth death  
 So far annihilate things that she destroys  
 The bodies of matter ; but she dissipates  
 Their combinations, and conjoins anew  
 One element with others ; and contrives  
 That all things vary forms and change their colours  
 And get sensations and straight give them o'er.  
 And thus may'st know it matters with *what* others  
 And in *what* structure the primordial germs  
 Are held together, and *what* motions they  
 Among themselves do give and get ; nor think  
 That aught we see hither and thither afloat  
 Upon the crest of things, and now a birth  
 And straightway now a ruin, inheres at rest  
 Deep in the eternal atoms of the world.

Why, even in these our very verses here  
 It matters much with what and in what order  
 Each element is set : the same denote  
 Sky, and the ocean, lands, and streams, and sun ;  
 The same, the grains, and trees, and living things.



And if not all alike, at least the most <sup>1</sup> —  
But what distinctions by positions wrought !  
And thus no less in things themselves, when once  
Around are changed the intervals between,  
The paths of matter, its connections, weights,  
Blows, clashings, motions, order, structure, shapes,  
The things themselves must likewise changèd be.

Now to true reason give thy mind for us.  
Since here strange truth is putting forth its might  
To hit thee in thine ears, a new aspèct  
Of things to show its front. Yet naught there is  
So easy that it standeth not at first  
More hard to credit than it after is ;  
And naught soe'er that's great to such degree,  
Nor wonderful so far, but all mankind  
Little by little abandon their surprise.  
Look upward yonder at the bright clear sky  
And what it holds—the stars that wander o'er,  
The moon, the radiance of the splendour-sun :  
Yet all, if now they first for mortals were,  
If unforeseen now first asudden shown,  
What might there be more wonderful to tell,  
What that the nations would before have dared  
Less to believe might be ?—I fancy, naught—  
So strange had been the marvel of that sight.  
The which o'erwearied to behold, to-day  
None deigns look upward to those lucent realms.  
Then, spew not reason from thy mind away,  
Beside thyself because the matter's new,  
But rather with keen judgment nicely weigh ;  
And if to thee it then appeareth true,  
Render thy hands, or, if 'tis false at last,

<sup>1</sup> This certainly seems a use of the analogy inconsistent with that in a preceding paragraph—as if one of many indications of the unrevised state of the poet's text.

Gird thee to combat. For my mind-of-man  
 Now seeks the nature of the vast Beyond  
 There on the other side, that boundless sum  
 Which lies without the ramparts of the world,  
 Toward which the spirit longs to peer afar,  
 Toward which indeed the swift élan of thought  
 Flies unencumbered forth.

Firstly, we find,

Off to all regions round, on either side,  
 Above, beneath, throughout the universe  
 End is there none—as I have taught, as too  
 The very thing of itself declares aloud,  
 And as from nature of the unbottomed deep  
 Shines clearly forth. Nor can we once suppose  
 In any way 'tis likely, (seeing that space  
 To all sides stretches infinite and free,  
 And seeds, innumerable in number, in sum  
 Bottomless, there in many a manner fly,  
 Bestirred in everlasting motion there),  
 That only this one earth and sky of ours  
 Hath been create and that those bodies of stuff,  
 So many, perform no work outside the same ;  
 Seeing, moreover, *this* world too hath been  
 By nature fashioned, even as seeds of things  
 By innate motion chanced to clash and cling—  
 After they'd been in many a manner driven  
 Together at random, without design, in vain—  
 And as at last those seeds together dwelt,  
 Which, when together of a sudden thrown,  
 Should always furnish the commencements fit  
 Of mighty things—the earth, the sea, the sky,  
 And race of living creatures. Thus, I say,  
 Again, again, 't must be confessed there are  
 Such congregations of matter elsewhere,  
 Like this our world which vasty ether holds

In huge embrace.

Besides, when matter abundant  
Is ready there, when space on hand, nor object  
Nor any cause retards, no marvel 'tis  
That things are carried on and made complete,  
Perforce. And now, if store of seeds there is  
So great that not whole life-times of the living  
Can count the tale . . .

And if their force and nature abide the same,  
Able to throw the seeds of things together  
Into their places, even as here are thrown  
The seeds together in this world of ours,  
'T must be confessed in other realms there are  
Still other worlds, still other breeds of men,  
And other generations of the wild.

Hence too it happens in the sum there is  
No one thing single of its kind in birth,  
And single and sole in growth, but rather it is  
One member of some generated race,  
Among full many others of like kind.  
First, cast thy mind abroad upon the living :  
Thou'lt find the race of mountain-ranging wild  
Even thus to be, and thus the scions of men  
To be begot, and lastly the mute flocks  
Of scalèd fish, and wingèd frames of birds.  
Wherefore confess we must on grounds the same  
That earth, sun, moon, and ocean, and all else,  
Exist not sole and single—rather in number  
Exceeding number. Since that deeply set  
Old boundary stone of life remains for them  
No less, and theirs a body of mortal birth  
No less, than every kind which here on earth  
Is so abundant in its members found.

Which well perceivèd if thou hold in mind,  
Then Nature, delivered from every haughty lord,

And forthwith free, is seen to do all things  
 Herself and through herself of own accord,  
 Rid of all gods. For—by their holy hearts  
 Which pass in long tranquillity of peace  
 Untroubled ages and a sérene life !—

Who hath the power (I ask), who hath the power  
 To rule the sum of the immeasurable,  
 To hold with steady hand the giant reins  
 Of the unfathomed deep ? Who hath the power  
 At once to roll a multitude of skies,  
 At once to heat with fires ethereal all  
 The fruitful lands of multitudes of worlds,  
 To be at all times in all places near,  
 To stablish darkness by his clouds, to shake  
 The sérene spaces of the sky with sound,  
 And hurl his lightnings,—ha, and whelm how oft  
 In ruins his own temples, and to rave,  
 Retiring to the wildernesses, there  
 At practice with that thunderbolt of his,  
 Which yet how often shoots the guilty by,  
 And slays the honourable blameless ones !

Ere since the birth-time of the world, ere since  
 The risen first-born day of sea, earth, sun,  
 Have many germs been added from outside,  
 Have many seeds been added round about,  
 Which the great All, the while it flung them on,  
 Brought hither, that from them the sea and lands  
 Could grow more big, and that the house of heaven  
 Might get more room and raise its lofty roofs  
 Far over earth, and air arise around.

For bodies all, from out all regions, are  
 Divided by blows, each to its proper thing,  
 And all retire to their own proper kinds :  
 The moist to moist retires ; earth gets increase  
 From earthy body ; and fires, as on a forge,

Beat out new fire ; and ether forges ether ;  
Till nature, author and ender of the world,  
Hath led all things to éxtreme bound of growth :  
As haps when that which hath been poured inside  
The vital veins of life is now no more  
Than that which ebbs within them and runs off.  
This is the point where life for each thing ends ;  
This is the point where nature with her powers  
Curbs all increase. For whatsoe'er thou seest  
Grow big with glad increase, and step by step  
Climb upward to ripe age, these to themselves  
Take in more bodies than they send from selves,  
Whilst still the food is easily infused  
Through all the veins, and whilst the things are not  
So far expanded that they cast away  
Such numerous atoms as to cause a waste  
Greater than nutriment whereby they wax.  
For 't must be granted, truly, that from things  
Many a body ebbeth and runs off ;  
But yet still more must come, until the things  
Have touched development's top pinnacle ;  
Then old age breaks their powers and ripe strength  
And falls away into a worser part.  
For ever the ampler and more wide a thing,  
As soon as ever its augmentation ends,  
It scatters abroad forthwith to all sides round  
More bodies, sending them from out itself.  
Nor easily now is food disseminate  
Through all its veins ; nor is that food enough  
To equal with a new supply on hand  
Those plenteous exhalations it gives off.  
Thus, fairly, all things perish, when with ebbing  
They're made less dense and when from blows without  
They are laid low ; since food at last will fail  
Extremest eld, and bodies from outside

Cease not with thumping to undo a thing  
And overmaster by infesting blows.

Thus, too, the ramparts of the mighty world  
On all sides round shall taken be by storm,  
And tumble to wrack and shivered fragments down.  
For food it is must keep things whole, renewing ;  
'Tis food must prop and give support to all,—  
But to no purpose, since nor veins suffice  
To hold enough, nor nature ministers  
As much as needful. And even now 'tis thus :  
Its age is broken and the earth, outworn  
With many parturitions, scarce creates  
The little lives—she who created erst  
All generations and gave forth at birth  
Enormous bodies of wild beasts of old.  
For never, I fancy, did a golden cord  
From off the firmament above let down  
The mortal generations to the fields ;  
Nor sea, nor breakers pounding on the rocks  
Created them ; but earth it was who bore—  
The same to-day who feeds them from herself.  
Besides, herself of own accord, she first  
The shining grains and vineyards of all joy  
Created for mortality ; herself  
Gave the sweet fruitage and the pastures glad,  
Which now to-day yet scarcely wax in size,  
Even when aided by our toiling arms.  
We break the ox, and wear away the strength  
Of sturdy farm-hands ; iron tools to-day  
Barely avail for tilling of the fields,  
So niggardly they grudge our harvestings,  
So much increase our labour. Now to-day  
The agèd ploughman, shaking of his head,  
Sighs o'er and o'er that labours of his hands  
Have fallen out in vain, and, as he thinks

How present times are not as times of old,  
Often he praises the fortunes of his sire,  
And crackles, prating, how the ancient race,  
Fulfilled with piety, supported life  
With simple comfort in a narrow plot,  
Since, man for man, the measure of each field  
Was smaller far i' the old days. And, again,  
The gloomy planter of the withered vine  
Rails at the season's change and wearies heaven,  
Nor grasps that all of things by sure degrees  
Are wasting away and going to the tomb,  
Outworn by venerable length of life.





## BOOK III

## SUMMARY

Proem (1-93).

I. Nature and composition of the soul (94-416).

(a) *Animus* and *anima* (94-160).

(b) Their corporeal nature and their composition (161-257).

(c) Their functions and their relations with the body (258-416).

II. Proofs of the mortality of the soul (417-827).

Conclusion. Folly of the fear of death (828-1092).

## BOOK III

### PROEM—1-93

O THOU who first uplifted in such dark  
So clear a torch aloft, who first shed light  
Upon the profitable ends of man,  
O thee I follow, glory of the Greeks,  
And set my footsteps squarely planted now  
Even in the impress and the marks of thine—  
Less like one eager to dispute the palm,  
More as one craving out of very love  
That I may copy thee !—for how should swallow  
Contend with swans or what compare could be  
In a race between young kids with tumbling legs  
~~And the strong might of the horse ?~~ Our father thou,  
And finder-out of truth, and thou to us  
Suppliest a father's precepts ; and from out  
Those scriven leaves of thine, renownèd soul,  
(Like bees that sip of all in flowery wolds),  
We feed upon thy golden sayings all—  
Golden, and ever worthiest endless life.  
For soon as ever thy planning thought that sprang  
From god-like mind begins its loud proclaim  
Of nature's courses, terrors of the brain  
Asunder flee, the ramparts of the world  
Dispart away, and through the void entire  
I see the movements of the universe.  
Rises to vision the majesty of gods,  
And their abodes of everlasting calm  
Which neither wind may shake nor rain-cloud splash,  
Nor snow, congealèd by sharp frosts, may harm

With its white downfall : ever, unclouded sky  
 O'er roofs, and laughs with far-diffusèd light.  
 And nature gives to them their all, nor aught  
 May ever pluck their peace of mind away.  
 But nowhere to my vision rise no more  
 The vaults of Acheron, though the broad earth  
 Bars me no more from gazing down o'er all  
 Which under our feet is going on below  
 Along the void. O, here in these affairs  
 Some new divine delight and trembling awe  
 Takes hold through me, that thus by power of thine  
 Nature, so plain and manifest at last,  
 Hath been on every side laid bare to man !

And since I've taught already of what sort  
 The seeds of all things are, and how, distinct  
 In divers forms, they flit of own accord,  
 Stirred with a motion everlasting on,  
 And in what mode things be from them create,  
 Now, after such matters, should my verse, meseems,  
 Make clear the nature of the mind and soul,  
 And drive that dread of Acheron without,  
 Headlong, which so confounds our human life  
 Unto its deeps, pouring o'er all that is  
 The black of death, nor leaves not anything  
 To prosper—a liquid and unsullied joy.  
 For as to what men sometimes will affirm :  
 That more than Tartarus (the realm of death)  
 They fear diseases and a life of shame,  
 And know the substance of the soul is blood,  
 Or rather wind (if haply thus their whim),  
 And so need naught of this our science, then  
 Thou well may'st note from what's to follow now  
 That more for glory do they braggart forth  
 Than for belief. For mark these very same :  
 Exiles from country, fugitives afar

From sight of men, with charges foul attaint,  
Abased with every wretchedness, they yet  
Live, and where'er the wretches come, they yet  
Make the ancestral sacrifices there,  
Butcher the black sheep, and to gods below  
Offer the honours, and in bitter case  
Turn much more keenly to religiòn.  
Wherefore, it's surer testing of a man  
In doubtful perils—mark him as he is  
Amid adversities ; for then alone  
Are the true voices conjured from his breast,  
The mask off-stripped, reality behind.  
And greed, again, and the blind lust of honours  
Which force poor wretches past the bounds of law,  
And, oft allies and ministers of crime,  
To push through nights and days with hugest toil  
To rise untrammelled to the peaks of power—  
These wounds of life in no mean part are kept  
Festering and open by this fright of death.  
For ever we see fierce Want and foul Disgrace  
Dislodged afar from sécure life and sweet,  
Like huddling Shapes before the doors of death.  
And whilst, from these, men wish to scape afar,  
Driven by false terror, and afar remove,  
With civic blood a fortune they amass,  
They double their riches, greedy, heapers-up  
Of corpse on corpse, they have a cruel laugh  
For the sad burial of a brother-born,  
And hatred and fear of tables of their kin.  
Likewise, through this same terror, envy oft  
Makes them to peak because before their eyes  
That man is lordly, that man gazed upon  
Who walks begirt with honour glorious,  
Whilst they in filth and darkness roll around ;  
Some perish away for statues and a name,

And oft to that degree, from fright of death,  
 Will hate of living and beholding light  
 Take hold on humankind that they inflict  
 Their own destruction with a gloomy heart—  
 Forgetful that this fear is font of cares,  
 This fear the plague upon their sense of shame,  
 And this that breaks the ties of comradry  
 And oversets all reverence and faith,  
 Mid direst slaughter. For long ere to-day  
 Often were traitors to country and dear parents  
 Through quest to shun the realms of Acheron.  
 For just as children tremble and fear all  
 In the viewless dark, so even we at times  
 Dread in the light so many things that be  
 No whit more fearsome than what children feign,  
 Shuddering, will be upon them in the dark.  
 This terror, then, this darkness of the mind,  
 Not sunrise with its flaring spokes of light,  
 Nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse,  
 But only nature's aspect and her law.

#### NATURE AND COMPOSITION OF THE MIND—94-416

First, then, I say, the mind which oft we call  
 The intellect, wherein is seated life's  
 Counsel and regimen, is part no less  
 Of man than hand and foot and eyes are parts  
 Of one whole breathing creature. [But some hold]  
 That sense of mind is in no fixed part seated,  
 But is of body some one vital state,—  
 Named "harmony" by Greeks, because thereby  
 We live with sense, though intellect be not  
 In any part: as oft the body is said  
 To have good health (when health, however, 's not

One part of him who has it), so they place  
The sense of mind in no fixed part of man.  
Mightily, diversly, meseems they err.  
Often the body palpable and seen  
Sickens, while yet in some invisible part  
We feel a pleasure ; oft the other way,  
A miserable in mind feels pleasure still  
Throughout his body—quite the same as when  
A foot may pain without a pain in head.  
Besides, when these our limbs are given o'er  
To gentle sleep and lies the burdened frame  
At random void of sense, a something else  
Is yet within us, which upon that time  
Bestirs itself in many a wise, receiving  
All motions of joy and phantom cares of heart.  
Now, for to see that in man's members dwells  
Also the soul, and body ne'er is wont  
To feel sensation by a "harmony,"  
Take this in chief : the fact that life remains  
Oft in our limbs, when much of body's gone ;  
Yet that same life, when particles of heat,  
Though few, have scattered been, and through the mouth  
Air has been given forth abroad, forthwith  
Forever deserts the veins, and leaves the bones.  
Thus mayst thou know that not all particles  
Perform like parts, nor in like manner all  
Are props of weal and safety : rather those—  
The seeds of wind and exhalations warm—  
Take care that in our members life remains.  
Therefore a vital heat and wind there is  
Within the very body, which at death  
Deserts our frames. And so, since nature of mind  
And even of soul is found to be, as 'twere,  
A part of man, give over "harmony"—  
Name to musicians brought from Helicon,—

Unless themselves they filched it otherwise,  
 To serve for what was lacking name till then.  
 Whate'er it be, they're welcome to it—thou,  
 Hearken my other maxims.

Mind and soul,

I say, are held conjoinèd one with other,  
 And form one single nature of themselves ;  
 But chief and regnant through the frame entire  
 Is still that counsel which we call the mind,  
 And that cleaves seated in the midmost breast.  
 Here leap dismay and terror ; round these haunts  
 Be blandishments of joys ; and therefore here  
 The intellect, the mind. The rest of soul,  
 Throughout the body scattered, but obeys—  
 Moved by the nod and motion of the mind.  
 This, for itself, sole through itself, hath thought ;  
 This for itself hath mirth, even when the thing  
 That moves it, moves nor soul nor body at all.  
 And as, when head or eye in us is smit  
 By assailing pain, we are not tortured then  
 Through all the body, so the mind alone  
 Is sometimes smitten, or livens with a joy,  
 Whilst yet the soul's remainder through the limbs  
 And through the frame is stirred by nothing new.  
 But when the mind is moved by shock more fierce,  
 We mark the whole soul suffering all at once  
 Along man's members : sweats and pallors spread  
 Over the body, and the tongue is broken,  
 And fails the voice away, and ring the ears,  
 Mists blind the eyeballs, and the joints collapse,—  
 Aye, men drop dead from terror of the mind.  
 Hence, whoso will can readily remark  
 That soul conjoinèd is with mind, and, when  
 'Tis strook by influence of the mind, forthwith  
 In turn it hits and drives the body too.



And this same argument establisheth  
 That nature of mind and soul corporeal is :  
 For when 'tis seen to drive the members on,  
 To snatch from sleep the body, and to change  
 The countenance, and the whole state of man  
 To rule and turn,—what yet could never be  
 Sans contact, and sans body contact fails—  
 Must we not grant that mind and soul consist  
 Of a corporeal nature ?—And besides  
 Thou markst that likewise with this body of ours  
 Suffers the mind and with our body feels.  
 If the dire speed of spear that cleaves the bones  
 And bares the inner thews hits not the life,  
 Yet follows a fainting and a foul collapse,  
 And, on the ground, dazed tumult in the mind,  
 And whiles a wavering will to rise afoot.  
 So nature of mind must be corporeal, since  
 From stroke and spear corporeal 'tis in throes.

Now, of what body, what components formed  
 Is this same mind I will go on to tell.  
 First, I aver, 'tis superfine, composed  
 Of tiniest particles—that such the fact  
 Thou canst perceive, if thou attend, from this :  
 Nothing is seen to happen with such speed  
 As what the mind proposes and begins ;  
 Therefore the same bestirs itself more swiftly  
 Than aught whose nature's palpable to eyes.  
 But what's so agile must of seeds consist  
 Most round, most tiny, that they may be moved,  
 When hit by impulse slight. So water moves,  
 In waves along, at impulse just the least—  
 Being create of little shapes that roll ;  
 But, contrariwise, the quality of honey  
 More stable is, its liquids more inert,  
 More tardy its flow ; for all its stock of matter

Cleaves more together, since, indeed, 'tis made  
Of atoms not so smooth, so fine, and round.  
For the light breeze that hovers yet can blow  
High heaps of poppy-seed away for thee  
Downward from off the top ; but, contrariwise,  
A pile of stones or spiny ears of wheat  
It can't at all. Thus, in so far as bodies  
Are small and smooth, is their mobility ;  
But, contrariwise, the heavier and more rough,  
The more immovable they prove. Now, then,  
Since nature of mind is movable so much,  
Consist it must of seeds exceeding small  
And smooth and round. Which fact once known to thee,  
Good friend, will serve thee opportune in else.  
*This* also shows the nature of the same,  
How nice its texture, in how small a space  
'Twould go, if once compacted as a pellet :  
When death's unvexed repose gets hold on man  
And mind and soul retire, thou markest there  
From the whole body nothing ta'en in form,  
Nothing in weight. Death grants ye everything,  
But vital sense and exhalation hot.  
Thus soul entire must be of smallmost seeds,  
Twined through the veins, the vitals, and the thews,  
Seeing that, when 'tis from whole body gone,  
The outward figuration of the limbs  
Is unimpaired and weight fails not a whit.  
Just so, when vanished the bouquet of wine,  
Or when an unguent's perfume delicate  
Into the winds away departs, or when  
From any body savour's gone, yet still  
The thing itself seems minished naught to eyes,  
Thereby, nor aught abstracted from its weight—  
No marvel, because seeds many and minute  
Produce the savours and the redolence

In the whole body of the things. And so,  
Again, again, nature of mind and soul  
'Tis thine to know created is of seeds  
The tiniest ever, since at flying-forth  
It beareth nothing of the weight away.

Yet fancy not its nature simple so.  
For an impalpable aura, mixed with heat,  
Deserts the dying, and heat draws off the air ;  
And heat there's none, unless commixed with air :  
For, since the nature of all heat is rare,  
Athrough it many seeds of air must move.  
Thus nature of mind is triple ; yet those all  
Suffice not for creating sense—since mind  
Accepteth not that aught of these can cause  
Sense-bearing motions, and much less the thoughts  
A man revolves in mind. So unto these  
Must added be a somewhat, and a fourth ;  
That somewhat's altogether void of name ;  
Than which existeth naught more mobile, naught  
More an impalpable, of elements  
More small and smooth and round. That first transmits  
Sense-bearing motions through the frame, for that  
Is roused the first, composed of little shapes ;  
Thence heat and viewless force of wind <sup>1</sup> take up  
The motions, and thence air, and thence all things  
Are put in motion ; the blood is strook, and then  
The vitals all begin to feel, and last  
To bones and marrow the sensation comes—  
Pleasure or torment. Nor will pain for naught  
Enter so far, nor a sharp ill seep through,  
But all things be perturbed to that degree  
That room for life will fail, and parts of soul  
Will scatter through the body's every pore.  
Yet as a rule, almost upon the skin

<sup>1</sup> The aura referred to above.

These motions all are stopped, and this is why  
We have the power to retain our life.

Now in my eagerness to tell thee how  
They are commixèd, through what unions fit  
They function so, my country's pauper-speech  
Constrains me sadly. As I can, however,  
I'll touch some points and pass. In such a wise  
Course these primordials 'mongst one another  
With inter-motions that no one can be  
From other sundered, nor its agency  
Perform, if once divided by a space ;  
Like many powers in one body they work.  
As in the flesh of any creature still  
Is odour and savour and a certain warmth,  
And yet from all of these one bulk of body  
Is made complete, so, viewless force of wind  
And warmth and air, commingled, do create  
One nature, by that mobile energy  
Assisted which from out itself to them  
Imparts initial motion, whereby first  
Sense-bearing motion along the vitals springs.  
For lurks this essence far and deep and under,  
Nor in our body is aught more shut from view,  
And 'tis the very soul of all the soul.  
And as within our members and whole frame  
The energy of mind and power of soul  
Is mixed and latent, since create it is  
Of bodies small and few, so lurks this fourth,  
This essence void of name, composed of small,  
And seems the very soul of all the soul,  
And holds dominion o'er the body all.  
And by like reason wind and air and heat  
Must function so, commingled through the frame,  
And now the one subside and now another  
In interchange of dominance, that thus

From all of them one nature be produced,  
Lest heat and wind apart, and air apart,  
Make sense to perish, by disseverment.

There is indeed in mind that heat it gets  
When seething in rage, and flashes from the eyes  
More swiftly fire ; there is, again, that wind,  
Much, and so cold, companion of all dread,  
Which rouses the shudder in the shaken frame ;  
There is no less that state of air composed,  
Making the tranquil breast, the sérene face.  
But more of hot have they whose restive hearts,  
Whose minds of passion quickly seethe in rage—  
Of which kind chief are fierce abounding lions,  
Who often with roaring burst the breast o'erwrought,  
Unable to hold the surging wrath within ;  
But the cold mind of stags has more of wind,  
And speedier through their inwards rouses up  
The icy currents which make their members quake.  
But more the oxen live by tranquil air,  
Nor e'er doth smoky torch of wrath applied,  
O'erspreading with shadows of a darkling murk,  
Rouse them too far ; nor will they stiffen stark,  
Pierced through by icy javelins of fear ;  
But have their place half-way between the two—  
Stags and fierce lions. Thus the race of men :  
Though training make them equally refined,  
It leaves those pristine vestiges behind  
Of each mind's nature. Nor may we suppose  
Evil can e'er be rooted up so far  
That one man's not more given to fits of wrath,  
Another's not more quickly touched by fear,  
A third not more long-suffering than he should.  
And needs must differ in many things besides  
The varied natures and resulting habits  
Of humankind—of which not now can I

Expound the hidden causes, nor find names  
 Enough for all the divers shapes of those  
 Primordials whence this variation springs.  
 But this meseems I'm able to declare :  
 Those vestiges of natures left behind  
 Which reason cannot quite expel from us  
 Are still so slight that naught prevents a man  
 From living a life even worthy of the gods.

So then this soul is kept by all the body,  
 Itself the body's guard, and source of weal :  
 For they with common roots cleave each to each,  
 Nor can be torn asunder without death.  
 Not easy 'tis from lumps of frankincense  
 To tear their fragrance forth, without its nature  
 Perishing likewise : so, not easy 'tis  
 From all the body nature of mind and soul  
 To draw away, without the whole dissolved.  
 With seeds so interwinèd even from birth,  
 They're dowered conjointly with a partner-life ;  
 No energy of body or mind, apart,  
 Each of itself without the other's power,  
 Can have sensation ; but our sense, enkindled  
 Along the vitals, to flame is blown by both  
 With mutual motions. Besides the body alone  
 Is nor begot nor grows, nor after death  
 Seen to endure. For not as water at times  
 Gives off the alien heat, nor is thereby  
 Itself destroyed, but unimpaired remains—  
 Not thus, I say, can the deserted frame  
 Bear the dissevering of its joinèd soul,  
 But, rent and ruined, moulders all away.  
 Thus the joint contact of the body and soul  
 Learn from their earliest age the vital motions,  
 Even when still buried in the mother's womb ;  
 So no dissevering can hap to them,

Without their bane and ill. And thence mayst see  
That, as conjoinèd is their source of weal,  
Conjoinèd also must their nature be.

If one, moreover, denies that body feel,  
And holds that soul, through all the body mixed,  
Takes on this motion which we title "sense,"  
He battles in vain indubitable facts :  
For who'll explain what body's feeling is,  
Except by what the public fact itself  
Has given and taught us ? "But when soul is parted,  
Body's without all sense." True !—loses what  
Was even in its life-time not its own ;<sup>1</sup>  
And much beside it loses, when soul's driven  
Forth from that life-time. Or, to say that eyes  
Themselves can see no thing, but through the same  
The mind looks forth, as out of opened doors,  
Is—a hard saying ; since the feel in eyes  
Says the reverse. For this itself draws on  
And forces into the pupils of our eyes  
Our consciousness. And note the case when often  
We lack the power to see refulgent things,  
Because our eyes are hampered by their light—  
With a mere doorway this would happen not ;  
For, since it is our very selves that see,  
No open portals undertake the toil.  
Besides, if eyes of ours but act as doors,  
Methinks that, were our sight removed, the mind  
Ought then still better to behold a thing—  
When even the door-posts have been cleared away.

Herein in these affairs nowise take up  
What honoured sage, Democritus, lays down—  
That proposition, that primordials

<sup>1</sup> What was merely a communicated property. See particularly Guissani's Italian commentary ; but the translator disagrees as to the subject of *expellitur*.

## 106      Of the Nature of Things

Of body and mind, each super-posed on each,  
Vary alternately and interweave  
The fabric of our members. For not only  
Are the soul-elements smaller far than those  
Which this our body and inward parts compose,  
But also are they in their number less,  
And scattered sparsely through our frame. And thus  
This canst thou guarantee : soul's primal germs  
Maintain between them intervals as large  
At least as are the smallest bodies, which,  
When thrown against us, in our body rouse  
Sense-bearing motions. Hence it comes that we  
Sometimes don't feel alighting on our frames  
The clinging dust, or chalk that settles soft ;  
Nor mists of night, nor spider's gossamer  
We feel against us, when, upon our road,  
Its net entangles us, nor on our head  
The dropping of its withered garmentings ;  
Nor bird-feathers, nor vegetable down,  
Flying about, so light they barely fall ;  
Nor feel the steps of every crawling thing,  
Nor each of all those footprints on our skin  
Of midges and the like. To that degree  
Must many primal germs be stirred in us  
Ere once the seeds of soul that through our frame  
Are intermingled 'gin to feel that those  
Primordials of the body have been strook,  
And ere, in pounding with such gaps between,  
They clash, combine and leap apart in turn.

But mind is more the keeper of the gates,  
Hath more dominion over life than soul.  
For without intellect and mind there's not  
One part of soul can rest within our frame  
Least part of time ; companioning, it goes  
With mind into the winds away, and leaves



The icy members in the cold of death.  
 But he whose mind and intellect abide  
 Himself abides in life. However much  
 The trunk be mangled, with the limbs lopped off,  
 The soul withdrawn and taken from the limbs,  
 Still lives the trunk and draws the vital air.  
 Even when deprived of all but all the soul,  
 Yet will it linger on and cleave to life,—  
 Just as the power of vision still is strong,  
 If but the pupil shall abide unharmed,  
 Even when the eye around it's sorely rent—  
 Provided only thou destroyest not  
 Wholly the ball, but, cutting round the pupil,  
 Leavest that pupil by itself behind—  
 For more would ruin sight. But if that centre,  
 That tiny part of eye, be eaten through,  
 Forthwith the vision fails and darkness comes,  
 Though in all else the unblemished ball be clear.  
 'Tis by like compact that the soul and mind  
 Are each to other bound forevermore.

THE SOUL IS MORTAL—417-827

Now come : that thou mayst able be to know  
 That minds and the light souls of all that live  
 Have mortal birth and death, I will go on  
 Verses to build meet for thy rule of life,  
 Sought after long, discovered with sweet toil.  
 But under one name I'd have thee yoke them both ;  
 And when, for instance, I shall speak of soul,  
 Teaching the same to be but mortal, think  
 Thereby I'm speaking also of the mind—  
 Since both are one, a substance inter-joined.  
 First, then, since I have taught how soul exists

108      Of the Nature of Things

A subtle fabric, of particles minute,  
Made up from atoms smaller much than those  
Of water's liquid damp, or fog, or smoke,  
So in mobility it far excels,  
More prone to move, though strook by lighter cause,  
Even moved by images of smoke or fog—  
As where we view, when in our sleeps we're lulled,  
The altars exhaling steam and smoke aloft—  
For, beyond doubt, these apparitions come  
To us from outward. Now, then, since thou seest,  
Their liquids depart, their waters flow away,  
When jars are shivered, and since fog and smoke  
Depart into the winds away, believe  
The soul no less is shed abroad and dies  
More quickly far, more quickly is dissolved  
Back to its primal bodies, when withdrawn  
From out man's members it has gone away.  
For, sure, if body (container of the same  
Like as a jar), when shivered from some cause,  
And rarefied by loss of blood from veins,  
Cannot for longer hold the soul, how then  
Thinkst thou it can be held by any air—  
A stuff much rarer than our bodies be ?

Besides we feel that mind to being comes  
Along with body, with body grows and ages.  
For just as children totter round about  
With frames infirm and tender, so there follows  
A weakling wisdom in their minds ; and then,  
Where years have ripened into robust powers,  
Counsel is also greater, more increased  
The power of mind ; thereafter, where already  
The body's shattered by master-powers of eld,  
And fallen the frame with its enfeebled powers,  
Thought hobbles, tongue wanders, and the mind gives  
way ;

All fails, all's lacking at the selfsame time.  
Therefore it suits that even the soul's dissolved,  
Like smoke, into the lofty winds of air ;  
Since we behold the same to being come  
Along with body and grow, and, as I've taught,  
Crumble and crack, therewith outworn by eld.

Then, too, we see, that, just as body takes  
Monstrous diseases and the dreadful pain,  
So mind its bitter cares, the grief, the fear ;  
Wherefore it tallies that the mind no less  
Partaker is of death ; for pain and disease  
Are both artificers of death,—as well  
We've learned by the passing of many a man ere now.  
Nay, too, in diseases of body, often the mind  
Wanders afield ; for 'tis beside itself,  
And crazed it speaks, or many a time it sinks,  
With eyelids closing and a drooping nod,  
In heavy drowse, on to eternal sleep ;  
From whence nor hears it any voices more,  
Nor able is to know the faces here  
Of those about him standing with wet cheeks  
Who vainly call him back to light and life.  
Wherefore mind too, confess we must, dissolves,  
Seeing, indeed, contagions of disease  
Enter into the same. Again, O why,  
When the strong wine has entered into man,  
And its diffusèd fire gone round the veins,  
Why follows then a heaviness of limbs,  
A tangle of the legs as round he reels,  
A stuttering tongue, an intellect besoaked,  
Eyes all aswim, and hiccups, shouts, and brawls,  
And whatso else is of that ilk ?—Why this ?—  
If not that violent and impetuous wine  
Is wont to confound the soul within the body ?  
But whatso can confounded be and balked,

Gives proof, that if a hardier cause got in,  
 'Twould hap that it would perish then, bereaved  
 Of any life thereafter. And, moreover,  
 Often will some one in a sudden fit,  
 As if by stroke of lightning, tumble down  
 Before our eyes, and sputter foam, and grunt,  
 Blither, and twist about with sinews taut,  
 Gasp up in starts, and weary out his limbs  
 With tossing round. No marvel, since distract  
 Through frame by violence of disease . . .

Confounds, he foams, as if to vomit soul,  
 As on the salt sea boil the billows round  
 Under the master might of winds. And now  
 A groan's forced out, because his limbs are griped,  
 But, in the main, because the seeds of voice  
 Are driven forth and carried in a mass  
 Outwards by mouth, where they are wont to go,  
 And have a builded highway. He becomes  
 Mere fool, since energy of mind and soul  
 Confounded is, and, as I've shown, to-riven,  
 Asunder thrown, and torn to pieces all  
 By that same venom. But, again, where cause  
 Of that disease has faced about, and back  
 Retreats sharp poison of corrupted frame  
 Into its shadowy lairs, the man at first  
 Arises reeling, and gradually comes back  
 To all his senses and recovers soul.  
 Thus, since within the body itself of man  
 The mind and soul are by such great diseases  
 Shaken, so miserably in labour distraught,  
 Why, then, believe that in the open air,  
 Without a body, they can pass their life,  
 Immortal, battling with the master winds ?  
 And, since we mark the mind itself is cured,

Like the sick body, and restored can be  
By medicine, this is forewarning too  
That mortal lives the mind. For proper it is  
That whosoe'er begins and undertakes  
To alter the mind, or meditates to change  
Any another nature soever, should add  
New parts, or readjust the order given,  
Or from the sum remove at least a bit.  
But what's immortal willeth for itself  
Its parts be nor increased, nor rearranged,  
Nor any bit soever flow away :  
For change of anything from out its bounds  
Means instant death of that which was before.  
Ergo, the mind, whether in sickness fallen,  
Or by the medicine restored, gives signs,  
As I have taught, of its mortality.  
So surely will a fact of truth make head  
'Gainst errors' theories all, and so shut off  
All refuge from the adversary, and rout  
Error by two-edged confutation.

And since the mind is of a man one part,  
Which in one fixèd place remains, like ears,  
And eyes, and every sense which pilots life ;  
And just as hand, or eye, or nose, apart,  
Severed from us, can neither feel nor be,  
But in the least of time is left to rot,  
Thus mind alone can never be, without  
The body and the man himself, which seems,  
As 'twere the vessel of the same—or aught  
Whate'er thou'lt feign as yet more closely joined :  
Since body cleaves to mind by surest bonds.

Again, the body's and the mind's live powers  
Only in union prosper and enjoy ;  
For neither can nature of mind, alone of itself  
Sans body, give the vital motions forth ;

Nor, then, can body, wanting soul, endure  
 And use the senses. Verily, as the eye,  
 Alone, up-rended from its roots, apart  
 From all the body, can peer about at naught,  
 So soul and mind it seems are nothing able,  
 When by themselves. No marvel, because, commixed  
 Through veins and inwards, and through bones and  
 thews,

Their elements primordial are confined  
 By all the body, and own no power free  
 To bound around through interspaces big,  
 Thus, shut within these confines, they take on  
 Motions of sense, which, after death, thrown out  
 Beyond the body to the winds of air,  
 Take on they cannot—and on this account,  
 Because no more in such a way confined.  
 For air will be a body, be alive,  
 If in that air the soul can keep itself,  
 And in that air enclose those motions all  
 Which in the thews and in the body itself  
 A while ago 'twas making. So for this,  
 Again, again, I say confess we must,  
 That, when the body's wrappings are unwound,  
 And when the vital breath is forced without,  
 The soul, the senses of the mind dissolve,—  
 Since for the twain the cause and ground of life  
 Is in the fact of their conjoined estate.

Once more, since body's unable to sustain  
 Division from the soul, without decay  
 And óbscene stench, how canst thou doubt but that  
 The soul, uprisen from the body's deeps,  
 Has filtered away, wide-drifted like a smoke,  
 Or that the changèd body crumbling fell  
 With ruin so entire, because, indeed,  
 Its deep foundations have been moved from place,

The soul out-filtering even through the frame,  
And through the body's every winding way  
And orifice ? And so by many means  
Thou'rt free to learn that nature of the soul  
Hath passed in fragments out along the frame,  
And that 'twas shivered in the very body  
Ere ever it slipped abroad and swam away  
Into the winds of air. For never a man  
Dying appears to feel the soul go forth  
As one sure whole from all his body at once,  
Nor first come up the throat and into mouth ;  
But feels it failing in a certain spot,  
Even as he knows the senses too dissolve  
Each in its own location in the frame.  
But were this mind of ours immortal mind,  
Dying 'twould scarce bewail a dissolution,  
But rather the going, the leaving of its coat,  
Like to a snake. Wherefore, when once the body  
Hath passed away, admit we must that soul,  
Shivered in all that body, perished too.  
Nay, even when moving in the bounds of life,  
Often the soul, now tottering from some cause,  
Craves to go out, and from the frame entire  
Loosened to be ; the countenance becomes  
Flaccid, as if the supreme hour were there ;  
And flabbily collapse the members all  
Against the bloodless trunk—the kind of case  
We see when we remark in common phrase,  
“ That man's quite gone,” or “ fainted dead away ” ;  
And where there's now a bustle of alarm,  
And all are eager to get some hold upon  
The man's last link of life. For then the mind  
And all the power of soul are shook so sore,  
And these so totter along with all the frame,  
That any cause a little stronger might

Dissolve them altogether.—Why, then, doubt  
 That soul, when once without the body thrust,  
 There in the open, an enfeebled thing,  
 Its wrappings stripped away, cannot endure  
 Not only through no everlasting age,  
 But even, indeed, through not the least of time ?

Then, too, why never is the intellect,  
 The counselling mind, begotten in the head,  
 The feet, the hands, instead of cleaving still  
 To one sole seat, to one fixed haunt, the breast,  
 If not that fixed places be assigned  
 For each thing's birth, where each, when 'tis create,  
 Is able to endure, and that our frames  
 Have such complex adjustments that no shift  
 In order of our members may appear ?  
 To that degree effect succeeds to cause,  
 Nor is the flame once wont to be create  
 In flowing streams, nor cold begot in fire.

Besides, if nature of soul immortal be,  
 And able to feel, when from our frame disjoined,  
 The same, I fancy, must be thought to be  
 Endowed with senses five,—nor is there way  
 But this whereby to image to ourselves  
 How under-souls may roam in Acheron.  
 Thus painters and the elder race of bards  
 Have pictured souls with senses so endowed.  
 But neither eyes, nor nose, nor hand, alone  
 Apart from body can exist for soul,  
 Nor tongue nor ears apart. And hence indeed  
 Alone by self they can nor feel nor be.

And since we mark the vital sense to be  
 In the whole body, all one living thing,  
 If of a sudden a force with rapid stroke  
 Should slice it down the middle and cleave in twain,  
 Beyond a doubt likewise the soul itself,



Divided, dissevered, asunder will be flung  
Along with body. But what severed is  
And into sundry parts divides, indeed  
Admits it owns no everlasting nature.  
We hear how chariots of war, areek  
With hurly slaughter, lop with flashing scythes  
The limbs away so suddenly that there,  
Fallen from the trunk, they quiver on the earth,  
The while the mind and powers of the man  
Can feel no pain, for swiftness of his hurt,  
And sheer abandon in the zest of battle :  
With the remainder of his frame he seeks  
Anew the battle and the slaughter, nor marks  
How the swift wheels and scythes of ravin have dragged  
Off with the horses his left arm and shield ;  
Nor other how his right has dropped away,  
Mounting again and on. A third attempts  
With leg dismembered to arise and stand,  
Whilst, on the ground hard by, the dying foot  
Twitches its spreading toes. And even the head,  
When from the warm and living trunk lopped off,  
Keeps on the ground the vital countenance  
And open eyes, until 'thas rendered up  
All remnants of the soul. Nay, once again :  
If, when a serpent's darting forth its tongue,  
And lashing its tail, thou gettest chance to hew  
With axe its length of trunk to many parts,  
Thou'lt see each severed fragment writhing round  
With its fresh wound, and spattering up the sod,  
And there the fore-part seeking with the jaws  
After the hinder, with bite to stop the pain.  
So shall we say that these be souls entire  
In all those fractions ?—but from that 'twould follow  
One creature'd have in body many souls.  
Therefore, the soul, which was indeed but one,

Has been divided with the body too :  
 Each is but mortal, since alike is each  
 Hewn into many parts. Again, how often  
 We view our fellow going by degrees,  
 And losing limb by limb the vital sense ;  
 First nails and fingers of the feet turn blue,  
 Next die the feet and legs, then o'er the rest  
 Slow crawl the certain footsteps of cold death.  
 And since this nature of the soul is torn,  
 Nor mounts away, as at one time, entire,  
 We needs must hold it mortal. But perchance  
 If thou supposest that the soul itself  
 Can inward draw along the frame, and bring  
 Its parts together to one place, and so  
 From all the members draw the sense away,  
 Why, then, that place in which such stock of soul  
 Collected is, should greater seem in sense.  
 But since such place is nowhere, for a fact,  
 As said before, 'tis rent and scattered forth,  
 And so goes under. Or again, if now  
 I please to grant the false, and say that soul  
 Can thus be lumped within the frames of those  
 Who leave the sunshine, dying bit by bit,  
 Still must the soul as mortal be confessed ;  
 Nor aught it matters whether to wrack it go,  
 Dispersed in the winds, or, gathered in a mass  
 From all its parts, sink down to brutish death,  
 Since more and more in every region sense  
 Fails the whole man, and less and less of life  
 In every region lingers.

And besides,

If soul immortal is, and winds its way  
 Into the body at the birth of man,  
 Why can we not remember something, then,  
 Of life-time spent before ? why keep we not

Some footprints of the things we did of old ?  
 But if so changed hath been the power of mind,  
 That every recollection of things done  
 Is fallen away, at no o'erlong remove  
 Is that, I trow, from what we mean by death.  
 Wherefore 'tis sure that what hath been before  
 Hath died, and what now is is now create.

Moreover, if after the body hath been built  
 Our mind's live powers are wont to be put in,  
 Just at the moment that we come to birth,  
 And cross the sills of life, 'twould scarcely fit  
 For them to live as if they seemed to grow  
 Along with limbs and frame, even in the blood,  
 But rather as in a cavern all alone.  
 (Yet all the body duly throngs with sense.<sup>1</sup>)  
 But public fact declares against all this :  
 For soul is so entwined through the veins,  
 The flesh, the thews, the bones, that even the teeth  
 Share in sensation, as proven by dull ache,  
 By twinge from icy water, or grating crunch  
 Upon a stone that got in mouth with bread.  
 Wherefore, again, again, souls must be thought  
 Nor void of birth, nor free from law of death ;  
 Nor, if, from outward, in they wound their way,  
 Could they be thought as able so to cleave  
 To these our frames, nor, since so interwove,  
 Appears it that they're able to go forth  
 Unhurt and whole and loose themselves unscathed  
 From all the thews, articulations, bones.  
 But, if perchance thou thinkest that the soul,  
 From outward winding in its way, is wont  
 To seep and soak along these members ours,  
 Then all the more 'twill perish, being thus

<sup>1</sup> "Questo v. evidentemente non passa nel testo" is Guissani's correct comment, and Munro explains it as "a sarcastic gloss."

## 118      Of the Nature of Things

With body fused—for what will seep and soak  
Will be dissolvèd and will therefore die.  
For just as food, dispersed through all the pores  
Of body, and passed through limbs and all the frame,  
Perishes, supplying from itself the stuff  
For other nature, thus the soul and mind,  
Though whole and new into a body going,  
Are yet, by seeping in, dissolved away,  
Whilst, as through pores, to all the frame there pass  
Those particles from which created is  
This nature of mind, now ruler of our body,  
Born from that soul which perished, when divided  
Along the frame. Wherefore it seems that soul  
Hath both a natal and a funeral hour.

Besides are seeds of soul there left behind  
In the breathless body, or not? If there they are,  
It cannot justly be immortal deemed,  
Since, shorn of some parts lost, 'thas gone away :  
But if, borne off with members uncorrupt,  
'Thas fled so absolutely all away  
It leaves not one remainder of itself  
Behind in body, whence do cadavers, then,  
From out their putrid flesh exhale the worms,  
And whence does such a mass of living things,  
Boneless and bloodless, o'er the bloated frame  
Bubble and swarm? But if perchance thou thinkest  
That souls from outward into worms can wind,  
And each into a separate body come,  
And reckonest not why many thousand souls  
Collect where only one has gone away,  
Here is a point, in sooth, that seems to need  
Inquiry and a putting to the test :  
Whether the souls go on a hunt for seeds  
Of worms wherewith to build their dwelling places,  
Or enter bodies ready-made, as 'twere.

But why themselves they thus should do and toil  
 'Tis hard to say, since, being free of body,  
 They flit around, harassed by no disease,  
 Nor cold nor famine ; for the body labours  
 By more of kinship to these flaws of life,  
 And mind by contact with that body suffers  
 So many ills. But grant it be for them  
 However useful to construct a body  
 To which to enter in, 'tis plain they can't.  
 Then, souls for self no frames nor bodies make,  
 Nor is there how they once might enter in  
 To bodies ready-made—for they cannot  
 Be nicely interwoven with the same,  
 And there'll be formed no interplay of sense  
 Common to each.

Again, why is't there goes  
 Impetuous rage with lion's breed morose,  
 And cunning with foxes, and to deer why given  
 The ancestral fear and tendency to flee,  
 And why in short do all the rest of traits  
 Engender from the very start of life  
 In the members and mentality, if not  
 Because one certain power of mind that came  
 From its own seed and breed waxes the same  
 Along with all the body ? But were mind  
 Immortal, were it wont to change its bodies,  
 How topsy-turvy would earth's creatures act !  
 The Hyrcan hound would flee the onset oft  
 Of antlered stag, the scurrying hawk would quake  
 Along the winds of air at the coming dove,  
 And men would dote, and savage beasts be wise ;  
 For false the reasoning of those that say  
 Immortal mind is changed by change of body—  
 For what is changed dissolves, and therefore dies.  
 For parts are re-disposed and leave their order ;

Wherefore they must be also capable  
 Of dissolution through the frame at last,  
 That they along with body perish all.  
 But should some say that always souls of men  
 Go into human bodies, I will ask :  
 How can a wise become a dullard soul ?  
 And why is never a child's a prudent soul ?  
 And the mare's filly why not trained so well  
 As sturdy strength of steed ? We may be sure  
 They'll take their refuge in the thought that mind  
 Becomes a weakling in a weakling frame.  
 Yet be this so, 'tis needful to confess  
 The soul but mortal, since, so altered now  
 Throughout the frame, it loses the life and sense  
 It had before. Or how can mind wax strong  
 Coequally with body and attain  
 The cravèd flower of life, unless it be  
 The body's colleague in its origins ?  
 Or what's the purport of its going forth  
 From agèd limbs ?—fears it, perhaps, to stay,  
 Pent in a crumbled body ? Or lest its house,  
 Outworn by venerable length of days,  
 May topple down upon it ? But indeed  
 For an immortal perils are there none.

Again, at parturitions of the wild  
 And at the rites of Love, that souls should stand  
 Ready hard by seems ludicrous enough—  
 Immortals waiting for their mortal limbs  
 In numbers innumerable, contending madly  
 Which shall be first and chief to enter in !—  
 Unless perchance among the souls there be  
 Such treaties stablished that the first to come  
 Flying along, shall enter in the first,  
 And that they make no rivalries of strength !

Again, in ether can't exist a tree,

Nor clouds in ocean deeps, nor in the fields  
 Can fishes live, nor blood in timber be,  
 Nor sap in boulders : fixèd and arranged  
 Where everything may grow and have its place.  
 Thus nature of mind cannot arise alone  
 Without the body, nor exist afar  
 From thews and blood. But if 'twere possible,  
 Much rather might this very power of mind  
 Be in the head, the shoulders or the heels,  
 And, born in any part soever, yet  
 In the same man, in the same vessel abide.  
 But since within this body even of ours  
 Stands fixèd and appears arrangèd sure  
 Where soul and mind can each exist and grow,  
 Deny we must the more that they can have  
 Duration and birth, wholly outside the frame.  
 For, verily, the mortal to conjoin  
 With the eternal, and to feign they feel  
 Together, and can function each with each,  
 Is but to dote : for what can be conceived  
 Of more unlike, discrepant, ill-assorted,  
 Than something mortal in a union joined  
 With an immortal and a secular  
 To bear the outrageous tempests ?

Then, again,

Whatever abides eternal must indeed  
 Either repel all strokes, because 'tis made  
 Of solid body, and permit no entrance  
 Of aught with power to sunder from within  
 The parts compact—as are those seeds of stuff  
 Whose nature we've exhibited before ;  
 Or else be able to endure through time  
 For this : because they are from blows exempt,  
 As is the void, the which abides untouched,  
 Unsmitten by any stroke ; or else because

There is no room around, whereto things can,  
 As 'twere, depart in dissolution all,—  
 Even as the sum of sums eternal is,  
 Without or place beyond whereto things may  
 Asunder fly, or bodies which can smite,  
 And thus dissolve them by the blows of might.

But if perchance the soul's to be adjudged  
 Immortal, mainly on ground 'tis kept secure  
 In vital forces—either because there come  
 Never at all things hostile to its weal,  
 Or else because what come somehow retire,  
 Repelled or ere we feel the harm they work,

For, lo, besides that, when the frame's diseased,  
 Soul sickens too, there cometh, many a time,  
 That which torments it with the things to be,  
 Keeps it in dread, and wearies it with cares ;  
 And even when evil acts are of the past,  
 Still gnaw the old transgressions bitterly.  
 Add, too, that frenzy, peculiar to the mind,  
 And that oblivion of the things that were ;  
 Add its submergence in the murky waves  
 Of drowse and torpor.

#### FOLLY OF THE FEAR OF DEATH—828-1092

Therefore death to us  
 Is nothing, nor concerns us in the least,  
 Since nature of mind is mortal evermore.  
 And just as in the ages gone before  
 We felt no touch of ill, when all sides round  
 To battle came the Carthaginian host,  
 And the times, shaken by tumultuous war,  
 Under the aery coasts of arching heaven  
 Shuddered and trembled, and all humankind  
 Doubted to which the empery should fall



By land and sea, thus when we are no more,  
When comes that sundering of our body and soul  
Through which we're fashioned to a single state,  
Verily naught to us, us then no more,  
Can come to pass, naught move our senses then—  
No, not if earth confounded were with sea,  
And sea with heaven. But if indeed do feel  
The nature of mind and energy of soul,  
After their severance from this body of ours,  
Yet nothing 'tis to us who in the bonds  
And wedlock of the soul and body live,  
Through which we're fashioned to a single state.  
And, even if time collected after death  
The matter of our frames and set it all  
Again in place as now, and if again  
To us the light of life were given, O yet  
That process too would not concern us aught,  
When once the self-succession of our sense  
Has been asunder broken. And now and here,  
Little enough we're busied with the selves  
We were aforetime, nor, concerning them,  
Suffer a sore distress. For shouldst thou gaze  
Backwards across all yesterdays of time  
The immeasurable, thinking how manifold  
The motions of matter are, then couldst thou well  
Credit this too : often these very seeds  
(From which we are to-day) of old were set  
In the same order as they are to-day—  
Yet this we can't to consciousness recall  
Through the remembering mind. For there hath been  
An interposèd pause of life, and wide  
Have all the motions wandered everywhere  
From these our senses. For if woe and ail  
Perchance are toward, then the man to whom  
The bane can happen must himself be there

At that same time. But death precludeth this,  
 Forbidding life to him on whom might crowd  
 Such irk and care ; and granted 'tis to know :  
 Nothing for us there is to dread in death,  
 No wretchedness for him who is no more,  
 The same estate as if ne'er born before,  
 When death immortal hath ta'en the mortal life.

Hence, where thou seest a man to grieve because  
 When dead he rots with body laid away,  
 Or perishes in flames or jaws of beasts,  
 Know well : he rings not true, and that beneath  
 Still works an unseen sting upon his heart,  
 However he deny that he believes  
 His shall be aught of feeling after death.  
 For he, I fancy, grants not what he says,  
 Nor what that presupposes, and he fails  
 To pluck himself with all his roots from life  
 And cast that self away, quite unawares  
 Feigning that some remainder's left behind.  
 For when in life one pictures to oneself  
 His body dead by beasts and vultures torn,  
 He pities his state, dividing not himself  
 Therefrom, removing not the self enough  
 From the body flung away, imagining  
 Himself that body, and projecting there  
 His own sense, as he stands beside it : hence  
 He grieves that he is mortal born, nor marks  
 That in true death there is no second self  
 Alive and able to sorrow for self destroyed,  
 Or stand lamenting that the self lies there  
 Mangled or burning. For if it an evil is  
 Dead to be jerked about by jaw and fang  
 Of the wild brutes, I see not why 'twere not  
 Bitter to lie on fires and roast in flames,  
 Or suffocate in honey, and, reclined

On the smooth oblong of an icy slab,  
Grow stiff in cold, or sink with load of earth  
Down-crushing from above.

“ Thee now no more  
The joyful house and best of wives shall welcome,  
Nor little sons run up to snatch their kisses  
And touch with silent happiness thy heart.  
Thou shalt not speed in undertakings more,  
Nor be the warder of thine own no more.  
Poor wretch,” they say, “ one hostile hour hath ta'en  
Wretchedly from thee all life's many guerdons,”  
But add not, “ yet no longer unto thee  
Remains a remnant of desire for them.”  
If this they only well perceived with mind  
And followed up with maxims, they would free  
Their state of man from anguish and from fear.  
“ O even as here thou art, aslumber in death,  
So shalt thou slumber down the rest of time,  
Released from every harrying pang. But we,  
We have bewept thee with insatiate woe,  
Standing beside whilst on the awful pyre  
Thou wert made ashes ; and no day shall take  
For us the eternal sorrow from the breast.”  
But ask the mourner what's the bitterness  
That man should waste in an eternal grief,  
If, after all, the thing's but sleep and rest ?  
For when the soul and frame together are sunk  
In slumber, no one then demands his self  
Or being. Well, this sleep may be forever,  
Without desire of any selfhood more,  
For all it matters unto us asleep.  
Yet not at all do those primordial germs  
Roam round our members, at that time, afar  
From their own motions that produce our senses—  
Since, when he's startled from his sleep, a man

Collects his senses. Death is, then, to us  
 Much less—if there can be a less than that  
 Which is itself a nothing : for there comes  
 Hard upon death a scattering more great  
 Of the throng of matter, and no man wakes up  
 On whom once falls the icy pause of life.

This too, O often from the soul men say,  
 Along their couches holding of the cups,  
 With faces shaded by fresh wreaths awry :  
 “ Brief is this fruit of joy to paltry man,  
 Soon, soon departed, and thereafter, no,  
 It may not be recalled.”—As if, forsooth,  
 It were their prime of evils in great death  
 To parch, poor tongues, with thirst and arid drought,  
 Or chafe for any lack.

Once more, if Nature  
 Should of a sudden send a voice abroad,  
 And her own self inveigh against us so :  
 “ Mortal, what hast thou of such grave concern  
 That thou indulgest in too sickly plaints ?  
 Why this bemoaning and beweeeping death ?  
 For if thy life aforesaid and behind  
 To thee was grateful, and not all thy good  
 Was heaped as in sieve to flow away  
 And perish unavailingly, why not,  
 Even like a banqueter, depart the halls,  
 Laden with life ? why not with mind content  
 Take now, thou fool, thy unafflicted rest ?  
 But if whatever thou enjoyed hath been  
 Lavished and lost, and life is now offence,  
 Why seekest more to add—which in its turn  
 Will perish foully and fall out in vain ?  
 O why not rather make an end of life,  
 Of labour ? For all I may devise or find  
 To pleasure thee is nothing : all things are

The same forever. Though not yet thy body  
Wrinkles with years, nor yet the frame exhausts  
Outworn, still things abide the same, even if  
Thou goest on to conquer all of time  
With length of days, yea, if thou never diest"—  
What were our answer, but that Nature here  
Urges just suit and in her words lays down  
True cause of action? Yet should one complain,  
Riper in years and elder, and lament,  
Poor devil, his death more sorely than is fit,  
Then would she not, with greater right, on him  
Cry out, inveighing with a voice more shrill:  
"Off with thy tears, and choke thy whines, buffoon!  
Thou wrinklest—after thou hast had the sum  
Of the guerdons of life; yet, since thou cravest ever  
What's not at hand, contemning present good,  
That life has slipped away, unperfected  
And unavailing unto thee. And now,  
Or ere thou guessed it, death beside thy head  
Stands—and before thou canst be going home  
Sated and laden with the goodly feast.  
But now yield all that's alien to thine age,—  
Up, with good grace! make room for sons: thou must."  
Justly, I fancy, would she reason thus,  
Justly inveigh and gird: since ever the old  
Outcrowded by the new gives way, and ever  
The one thing from the others is repaired.  
Nor no man is consigned to the abyss  
Of Tartarus, the black. For stuff must be,  
That thus the after-generations grow,—  
Though these, their life completed, follow thee;  
And thus like thee are generations all—  
Already fallen, or some time to fall.  
So one thing from another rises ever;  
And in fee-simple life is given to none,

But unto all mere usufruct.

Look back :

Nothing to us was all fore-passèd eld  
 Of time the eternal, ere we had a birth.  
 And nature holds this like a mirror up  
 Of time-to-be when we are dead and gone.  
 And what is there so horrible appears ?  
 Now what is there so sad about it all ?  
 Is't not serener far than any sleep ?

And, verily, those tortures said to be  
 In Acheron, the deep, they all are ours  
 Here in this life. No Tantalus, benumbed  
 With baseless terror, as the fables tell,  
 Fears the huge boulder hanging in the air :  
 But, rather, in life an empty dread of Gods  
 Urges mortality, and each one fears  
 Such fall of fortune as may chance to him.  
 Nor eat the vultures into Tityus  
 Prostrate in Acheron, nor can they find,  
 Forsooth, throughout eternal ages, aught  
 To pry around for in that mighty breast.  
 However hugely he extend his bulk—  
 Who hath for outspread limbs not acres nine,  
 But the whole earth—he shall not able be  
 To bear eternal pain nor furnish food  
 From his own frame forever. But for us  
 A Tityus is he whom vultures rend  
 Prostrate in love, whom anxious anguish eats,  
 Whom troubles of any unappeased desires  
 Asunder rip. We have before our eyes  
 Here in this life also a Sisyphus  
 In him who seeketh of the populace  
 The rods, the axes fell, and evermore  
 Retires a beaten and a gloomy man.  
 For to seek after power—an empty name,

Nor given at all—and ever in the search  
 To endure a world of toil, O this it is  
 To shove with shoulder up the hill a stone  
 Which yet comes rolling back from off the top,  
 And headlong makes for levels of the plain.  
 Then to be always feeding an ingrate mind,  
 Filling with good things, satisfying never—  
 As do the seasons of the year for us,  
 When they return and bring their progenies  
 And varied charms, and we are never filled  
 With the fruits of life—O this, I fancy, 'tis  
 To pour, like those young virgins in the tale,  
 Waters into a sieve, unfilled forever.

• • • • •  
 Cerberus and Furies, and that Lack of Light

• • • • •  
 Tartarus, out-belching from his mouth the surge  
 Of horrible heat—the which are nowhere, nor  
 Indeed can be : but in this life is fear  
 Of retributions just and expiations  
 For evil acts : the dungeon and the leap  
 From that dread rock of infamy, the stripes,  
 The executioners, the oaken rack,  
 The iron plates, bitumen, and the torch.  
 And even though these are absent, yet the mind,  
 With a fore-fearing conscience, plies its goads  
 And burns beneath the lash, nor sees meanwhile  
 What terminus of ills, what end of pine  
 Can ever be, and feareth lest the same  
 But grow more heavy after death. Of truth,  
 The life of fools is Acheron on earth.

This also to thy very self sometimes  
 Repeat thou mayst : “ Lo, even good Ancus left  
 The sunshine with his eyes, in divers things  
 A better man than thou, O worthless hind ;

And many other kings and lords of rule  
 Thereafter have gone under, once who swayed  
 O'er mighty peoples. And he also, he—  
 Who whilom paved a highway down the sea,  
 And gave his legionaries thoroughfare  
 Along the deep, and taught them how to cross  
 The pools of brine afoot, and did contemn,  
 Trampling upon it with his cavalry,  
 The bellowings of ocean—poured his soul  
 From dying body, as his light was ta'en.  
 And Scipio's son, the thunderbolt of war,  
 Horror of Carthage, gave his bones to earth,  
 Like to the lowliest villein in the house.  
 Add finders-out of sciences and arts ;  
 Add comrades of the Heliconian dames,  
 Among whom Homer, sceptered o'er them all.  
 Now lies in slumber sunken with the rest.  
 Then, too, Democritus, when ripened old  
 Admonished him his memory waned away,  
 Of own accord offered his head to death.  
 Even Epicurus went, his light of life  
 Run out, the man in genius who o'er-topped  
 The human race, extinguishing all others,  
 As sun, in ether arisen, all the stars.  
 Wilt thou, then, dally, thou complain to go ?—  
 For whom already life's as good as dead,  
 Whilst yet thou livest and lookest ?—who in sleep  
 Wastest thy life—time's major part, and snoorest  
 Even when awake, and ceasest not to see  
 The stuff of dreams, and bearest a mind beset  
 By baseless terror, nor discoverest oft  
 What's wrong with thee, when, like a sotted wretch,  
 Thou'rt jostled along by many crowding cares,  
 And wanderest reeling round, with mind aswim."

If men, in that same way as on the mind



They *feel* the load that wearies with its weight,  
 Could also *know* the causes whence it comes,  
 And why so great the heap of ill on heart,  
 O not in this sort would they live their life,  
 As now so much we see them, knowing not  
 What 'tis they want, and seeking ever and ever  
 A change of place, as if to drop the burden.  
 The man who sickens of his home goes out,  
 Forth from his splendid halls, and straight—returns,  
 Feeling i'faith no better off abroad.  
 He races, driving his Gallic ponies along,  
 Down to his villa, madly,—as in haste  
 To hurry help to a house afire.—At once  
 He yawns, as soon as foot has touched the threshold,  
 Or drowsily goes off in sleep and seeks  
 Forgetfulness, or maybe bustles about  
 And makes for town again. In such a way  
 Each human flees himself—a self in sooth,  
 As happens, he by no means can escape ;  
 And willy-nilly he cleaves to it and loathes,  
 Sick, sick, and guessing not the cause of ail.  
 Yet should he see but *that*, O chiefly, then,  
 Leaving all else, he'd study to divine  
 The nature of things, since here is in debate  
 Eternal time and not the single hour,  
 Mortal's estate in whatsoever remains  
 After great death.

And too, when all is said,  
 What evil lust of life is this so great  
 Subdues us to live, so dreadfully distraught  
 In perils and alarms ? one fixèd end  
 Of life abideth for mortality ;  
 Death's not to shun, and we must go to meet.  
 Besides we're busied with the same devices,  
 Ever and ever, and we are at them ever,

And there's no new delight that may be forged  
By living on. But whilst the thing we long for  
Is lacking, that seems good above all else ;  
Thereafter, when we've touched it, something else  
We long for ; ever one equal thirst of life  
Grips us agape. And doubtful 'tis what fortune  
The future times may carry, or what be  
That chance may bring, or what the issue next  
Awaiting us. Nor by prolonging life  
Take we the least away from death's own time,  
Nor can we pluck one moment off, whereby  
To minish the aeons of our state of death.  
Therefore, O man, by living on, fulfil  
As many generations as thou may :  
Eternal death shall there be waiting still ;  
And he who died with light of yesterday  
Shall be no briefer time in death's No-more  
Than he who perished months or years before.

· BOOK IV

## SUMMARY

Proem (1-25).

I. Existence and character of the images (26-214).

- (a) Images exist (26-107).
- (b) Tenuity of the images (108-140).
- (c) Rapidity of their formation (141-174).
- (d) Their velocity (175-214).

II. The senses and mental pictures (215-819).

- (a) Sight and some related phenomena (215-376).
- (b) Some apparent deceptions of sight, and the veracity of the senses (377-519).
- (c) Hearing (520-612).
- (d) Taste (613-670).
- (e) Smell (671-684 + 704-719 + 685-703).  
(No specific mention is made of touch, as every sense is a form of touch.)
- (f) Mental pictures in sleep and waking (720-819).

III. Some vital functions (820-1049).

- (a) Against a teleological theory (820-854).
- (b) Food (855-903).
- (c) Sleep and dreams ; love (904-1049).

Epilogue. The passion of love (1050-1279).

## BOOK IV

### PROEM—1-25

I WANDER afield, thriving in sturdy thought,  
Through unpathed haunts of the Pierides,  
Trodden by step of none before. I joy  
To come on undefilèd fountains there,  
To drain them deep ; I joy to pluck new flowers,  
To seek for this my head a signal crown  
From regions where the Muses never yet  
Have garlanded the temples of a man :  
First, since I teach concerning mighty things,  
And go right on to loose from round the mind  
The tightened coils of dread religiòn ;  
Next, since, concerning themes so dark, I frame  
Song so pellucid, touching all throughout  
Even with the Muses' charm—which, as 'twould seem,  
Is not without a reasonable ground :  
For as physicians, when they seek to give  
Young boys the nauseous wormwood, first do touch  
The brim around the cup with the sweet juice  
And yellow of the honey, in order that  
The thoughtless age of boyhood be cajoled  
As far as the lips, and meanwhile swallow down  
The wormwood's bitter draught, and, though befooled,  
Be yet not merely duped, but rather thus  
Grow strong again with recreated health :  
So now I too (since this my doctrine seems  
In general somewhat woeful unto those  
Who've had it not in hand, and since the crowd  
Starts back from it in horror) have desired

To expound our doctrine unto thee in song  
 Soft-speaking and Pierian, and, as 'twere,  
 To touch it with sweet honey of the Muse—  
 If by such method haply I might hold  
 The mind of thee upon these lines of ours,  
 Till thou dost learn the nature of all things  
 And understandest their utility.

#### EXISTENCE AND CHARACTER OF THE IMAGES—26-214

But since I've taught already of what sort  
 The seeds of all things are, and how distinct  
 In divers forms they flit of own accord,  
 Stirred with a motion everlasting on,  
 And in what mode things be from them create,  
 And since I've taught what the mind's nature is,  
 And of what things 'tis with the body knit  
 And thrives in strength, and by what mode uptorn  
 That mind returns to its primordials,  
 Now will I undertake an argument—  
 One for these matters of supreme concern—  
 That there exist those somewhats which we call  
 The images of things : these, like to films  
 Scaled off the utmost outside of the things,  
 Flit hither and thither through the atmosphere,  
 And the same terrify our intellects,  
 Coming upon us waking or in sleep,  
 When oft we peer at wonderful strange shapes  
 And images of people lorn of light,  
 Which oft have horribly roused us when we lay  
 In slumber—that haply nevermore may we  
 Suppose that souls get loose from Acheron,  
 Or shades go floating in among the living,  
 Or aught of us is left behind at death,

When body and mind, destroyed together, each  
Back to its own primordials goes away.

And thus I say that effigies of things,  
And tenuous shapes from off the things are sent,  
From off the utmost outside of the things,  
Which are like films or may be named a rind,  
Because the image bears like look and form  
With whatso body has shed it fluttering forth—  
A fact thou mayst, however dull thy wits,  
Well learn from this : mainly, because we see  
Even 'mongst visible objects many be  
That send forth bodies, loosely some diffused—  
Like smoke from oaken logs and heat from fires—  
And some more interwoven and condensed—  
As when the locusts in the summertime  
Put off their glossy tunics, or when calves  
At birth drop membranes from their body's surface,  
Or when, again, the slippery serpent doffs  
Its vestments 'mongst the thorns—for oft we see  
The breres augmented with their flying spoils :  
Since such takes place, 'tis likewise certain too  
That tenuous images from things are sent,  
From off the utmost outside of the things,  
For why those kinds should drop and part from things,  
Rather than others tenuous and thin,  
No power has man to open mouth to tell ;  
Especially, since on outsides of things  
Are bodies many and minute which could,  
In the same order which they had before,  
And with the figure of their form preserved,  
Be thrown abroad, and much more swiftly too,  
Being less subject to impediments,  
As few in number and placed along the front.  
For truly many things we see discharge  
Their stuff at large, not only from their cores

## 138      Of the Nature of Things

Deep-set within, as we have said above,  
But from their surfaces at times no less—  
Their very colours too. And commonly  
The awnings, saffron, red, and dusky blue,  
Stretched overhead in mighty theatres,  
Upon their poles and cross-beams fluttering,  
Have such an action quite ; for there they dye  
And make to undulate with their every hue  
The circled throng below, and all the stage,  
And rich attire in the patrician seats.  
And ever the more the theatre's dark walls  
Around them shut, the more all things within  
Laugh in the bright suffusion of strange glints,  
The daylight being withdrawn. And therefore, since  
The canvas hangings thus discharge their dye  
From off their surface, things in general must  
Likewise their tenuous effigies discharge,  
Because in either case they are off-thrown  
From off the surface. So there are indeed  
Such certain prints and vestiges of forms  
Which flit around, of subtlest texture made,  
Invisible, when separate, each and one.  
Again, all odour, smoke, and heat, and such  
Stream out of things diffusèdly, because,  
Whilst coming from the deeps of body forth  
And rising out, along their bending path  
They're torn asunder, nor have gateways straight  
Wherethrough to mass themselves and struggle abroad.  
But contrariwise, when such a tenuous film  
Of outside colour is thrown off, there's naught  
Can rend it, since 'tis placed along the front  
Ready to hand. Lastly those images  
Which to our eyes in mirrors do appear,  
In water, or in any shining surface,  
Must be, since furnished with like look of things,



Fashioned from images of things sent out.  
 There are, then, tenuous effigies of forms,  
 Like unto them, which no one can divine  
 When taken singly, which do yet give back,  
 When by continued and recurrent discharge  
 Expelled, a picture from the mirrors' plane.  
 Nor otherwise, it seems, can they be kept  
 So well conserved that thus be given back  
 Figures so like each object.

Now then, learn

How tenuous is the nature of an image.  
 And in the first place, since primordials be  
 So far beneath our senses, and much less  
 E'en than those objects which begin to grow  
 Too small for eyes to note, learn now in few  
 How nice are the beginnings of all things—  
 That this, too, I may yet confirm in proof :  
 First, living creatures are sometimes so small  
 That even their third part can nowise be seen ;  
 Judge, then, the size of any inward organ—  
 What of their spherèd heart, their eyes, their limbs,  
 The skeleton ?—How tiny thus they are !  
 And what besides of those first particles  
 Whence soul and mind must fashioned be ?—Seest not  
 How nice and how minute ? Besides, whatever  
 Exhales from out its body a sharp smell—  
 The nauseous absinth, or the panacea,  
 Strong southernwood, or bitter centaury—  
 If never so lightly with thy [fingers] twain  
 Perchance [thou touch] a one of them

Then why not rather know that images  
 Flit hither and thither, many, in many modes,  
 Bodiless and invisible ?

But lest

Haply thou holdest that those images  
 Which come from objects are the sole that flit,  
 Others indeed there be of own accord  
 Begot, self-formèd in earth's aery skies,  
 Which, moulded to innumerable shapes,  
 Are borne aloft, and, fluid as they are,  
 Cease not to change appearance and to turn  
 Into new outlines of all sorts of forms ;  
 As we behold the clouds grow thick on high  
 And smirch the sérene vision of the world,  
 Stroking the air with motions. For oft are seen  
 The giants' faces flying far along  
 And trailing a spread of shadow ; and at times  
 The mighty mountains and mountain-sundered rocks  
 Going before and crossing on the sun,  
 Whereafter a monstrous beast dragging amain  
 And leading in the other thunderheads.  
 Now [hear] how easy and how swift they be  
 Engendered, and perpetually flow off  
 From things and gliding pass away. . . .

For ever every outside streams away  
 From off all objects, since discharge they may ;  
 And when this outside reaches other things,  
 As chiefly glass, it passes through ; but where  
 It reaches the rough rocks or stuff of wood,  
 There 'tis so rent that it cannot give back  
 An image. But when gleaming objects dense,  
 As chiefly mirrors, have been set before it,  
 Nothing of this sort happens. For it can't  
 Go, as through glass, nor yet be rent—its safety,  
 By virtue of that smoothness, being sure.  
 'Tis therefore that from them the images  
 Stream back to us ; and howso suddenly  
 Thou place, at any instant, anything

Before a mirror, there an image shows ;  
Proving that ever from a body's surface  
Flow off thin textures and thin shapes of things.  
Thus many images in little time  
Are gendered ; so their origin is named  
Rightly a speedy. And even as the sun  
Must send below, in little time, to earth  
So many beams to keep all things so full  
Of light incessant ; thus, on grounds the same,  
From things there must be borne, in many modes,  
To every quarter round, upon the moment,  
The many images of things ; because  
Unto whatever face of things we turn  
The mirror, things of form and hue the same  
Respond. Besides, though but a moment since  
Serenest was the weather of the sky,  
So fiercely sudden is it foully thick  
That ye might think that round about all murk  
Had parted forth from Acheron and filled  
The mighty vaults of sky—so grievously,  
As gathers thus the storm-clouds' gruesome night,  
Do faces of black horror hang on high—  
Of which how small a part an image is  
There's none to tell or reckon out in words.

Now come ; with what swift motion they are borne,  
These images, and what the speed assigned  
To them across the breezes swimming on—  
So that o'er lengths of space a little hour  
Alone is wasted, toward whatever region  
Each with its divers impulse tends—I'll tell  
In verses sweeter than they many are ;  
Even as the swan's slight note is better far  
Than that dispersèd clamour of the cranes  
Among the southwind's aery clouds. And first,  
One oft may see that objects which are light

And made of tiny bodies are the swift ;  
In which class is the sun's light and his heat,  
Since made from small primordial elements  
Which, as it were, are forward knocked along  
And through the interspaces of the air  
To pass delay not, urged by blows behind ;  
For light by light is instantly supplied  
And gleam by following gleam is spurred and driven.  
Thus likewise must the images have power  
Through unimaginable space to speed  
Within a point of time,—first, since a cause  
Exceeding small there is, which at their back  
Far forward drives them and propels, where, too,  
They're carried with such wingèd lightness on ;  
And, secondly, since furnished, when sent off,  
With texture of such rareness that they can  
Through objects whatsoever penetrate  
And ooze, as 'twere, through intervening air.  
Besides, if those fine particles of things  
Which from so deep within are sent abroad,  
As light and heat of sun, are seen to glide  
And spread themselves through all the space of heaven  
Upon one instant of the day, and fly  
O'er sea and lands and flood the heaven, what then  
Of those which on the outside stand prepared,  
When they're hurled off with not a thing to check  
Their going out ? Dost thou not see indeed  
How swifter and how farther must they go  
And speed through manifold the length of space  
In time the same that from the sun the rays  
O'erspread the heaven ? This also seems to be  
Example chief and true with what swift speed  
The images of things are borne about :  
That soon as ever under open skies  
Is spread the shining water, all at once,

If stars be out in heaven, upgleam from earth,  
 Serene and radiant in the water there,  
 The constellations of the universe—  
 Now seest thou not in what a point of time  
 An image from the shores of ether falls  
 Unto the shores of earth? Wherefore, again,  
 And yet again, 'tis needful to confess  
 With wondrous . . .

. . . . .

### THE SENSES AND MENTAL PICTURES—215-819

Bodies that strike the eyes, awaking sight.  
 From certain things flow odours evermore,  
 As cold from rivers, heat from sun, and spray  
 From waves of ocean, eater-out of walls  
 Around the coasts. Nor ever cease to flit  
 The varied voices, sounds athrough the air.  
 Then too there comes into the mouth at times  
 The wet of a salt taste, when by the sea  
 We roam about; and so, whene'er we watch  
 The wormwood being mixed, its bitter stings.  
 To such degree from all things is each thing  
 Borne streamingly along, and sent about  
 To every region round; and nature grants  
 Nor rest nor respite of the onward flow,  
 Since 'tis incessantly we feeling have,  
 And all the time are suffered to descry  
 And smell all things at hand, and hear them sound.  
 Besides, since shape examined by our hands  
 Within the dark is known to be the same  
 As that by eyes perceived within the light  
 And lustrous day, both touch and sight must be  
 By one like cause aroused. So, if we test

A square and get its stimulus on us  
 Within the dark, within the light what square  
 Can fall upon our sight, except a square  
 That images the things ? Wherefore it seems  
 The source of seeing is in images,  
 Nor without these can anything be viewed.

Now these same films I name are borne about  
 And tossed and scattered into regions all.  
 But since we do perceive alone through eyes,  
 It follows hence that whitherso we turn  
 Our sight, all things do strike against it there  
 With form and hue. And just how far from us  
 Each thing may be away, the image yields  
 To us the power to see and chance to tell :  
 For when 'tis sent, at once it shoves ahead  
 And drives along the air that's in the space  
 Betwixt it and our eyes. And thus this air  
 All glides athrough our eyeballs, and, as 'twere,  
 Brushes athrough our pupils and thuswise  
 Passes across. Therefore it comes we see  
 How far from us each thing may be away,  
 And the more air there be that's driven before,  
 And too the longer be the brushing breeze  
 Against our eyes, the farther off removed  
 Each thing is seen to be : forsooth, this work  
 With mightily swift order all goes on,  
 So that upon one instant we may see  
 What kind the object and how far away.

Nor over-marvellous must this be deemed  
 In these affairs that, though the films which strike  
 Upon the eyes cannot be singly seen,  
 The things themselves may be perceived. For thus  
 When the wind beats upon us stroke by stroke  
 And when the sharp cold streams, 'tis not our wont  
 To feel each private particle of wind

Or of that cold, but rather all at once ;  
 And so we see how blows affect our body,  
 As if one thing were beating on the same  
 And giving us the feel of its own body  
 Outside of us. Again, whene'er we thump  
 With finger-tip upon a stone, we touch  
 But the rock's surface and the outer hue,  
 Nor feel that hue by contact—rather feel  
 The very hardness deep within the rock.

Now come, and why beyond a looking-glass <sup>1</sup>  
 An image may be seen, perceive. For seen  
 It soothly is, removèd far within.

'Tis the same sort as objects peered upon  
 Outside in their true shape, whene'er a door  
 Yields through itself an open peering-place,  
 And lets us see so many things outside  
 Beyond the house. Also that sight is made  
 By a twofold twin air : for first is seen  
 The air inside the door-posts ; next the doors,  
 The twain to left and right ; and afterwards  
 A light beyond comes brushing through our eyes,  
 Then other air, then objects peered upon  
 Outside in their true shape. And thus, when first  
 The image of the glass projects itself,  
 As to our gaze it comes, it shoves ahead  
 And drives along the air that's in the space  
 Betwixt it and our eyes, and brings to pass  
 That we perceive the air ere yet the glass.  
 But when we've also seen the glass itself,  
 Forthwith that image which from us is borne  
 Reaches the glass, and there thrown back again  
 Comes back unto our eyes, and driving rolls  
 Ahead of itself another air, that then  
 'Tis this we see before itself, and thus

<sup>1</sup> The Roman mirrors were of course of metal.

It looks so far removed behind the glass.  
Wherefore again, again, there's naught for wonder

In those which render from the mirror's plane  
A vision back, since each thing comes to pass  
By means of the two airs. Now, in the glass  
The right part of our members is observed  
Upon the left, because, when comes the image  
Hitting against the level of the glass,  
'Tis not returned unshifted ; but forced off  
Backwards in line direct and not oblique,—  
Exactly as whoso his plaster-mask  
Should dash, before 'twere dry, on post or beam,  
And it should straightway keep, at clinging there,  
Its shape, reversèd, facing him who threw,  
And so remould the features it gives back :  
It comes that now the right eye is the left,  
The left the right. An image too may be  
From mirror into mirror handed on,  
Until of idol-films even five or six  
Have thus been gendered. For whatever things  
Shall hide back yonder in the house, the same,  
However far removed in twisting ways,  
May still be all brought forth through bending paths  
And by these several mirrors seen to be  
Within the house, since nature so compels  
All things to be borne backward and spring off  
At equal angles from all other things.<sup>1</sup>  
To such degree the image gleams across  
From mirror unto mirror ; where 'twas left  
It comes to be the right, and then again  
Returns and changes round unto the left.  
Again, those little sides of mirrors curved  
Proportionate to the bulge of our own flank

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* the angle of reflection equals the angle of incidence.



Send back to us their idols with the right  
Upon the right ; and this is so because  
Either the image is passed on along  
From mirror unto mirror,<sup>1</sup> and thereafter,  
When twice dashed off, flies back unto ourselves ;  
Or else the image wheels itself around,  
When once unto the mirror it has come,  
Since the curved surface teaches it to turn  
To usward. Further, thou might'st well believe  
That these film-idols step along with us  
And set their feet in unison with ours  
And imitate our carriage, since from that  
Part of a mirror whence thou hast withdrawn  
Straightway no images can be returned.

Further, our eye-balls tend to flee the bright  
And shun to gaze thereon ; the sun even blinds,  
If thou goest on to strain them unto him,  
Because his strength is mighty, and the films  
Heavily downward from on high are borne  
Through the pure ether and the viewless winds,  
And strike the eyes, disordering their joints.  
So piercing lustre often burns the eyes,  
Because it holdeth many seeds of fire  
Which, working into eyes, engender pain.  
Again, whatever jaundiced people view  
Becomes wan-yellow, since from out their bodies  
Flow many seeds wan-yellow forth to meet  
The films of things, and many too are mixed  
Within their eye, which by contagion paint  
All things with sallowness. Again, we view  
From dark recesses things that stand in light,  
Because, when first has entered and possessed  
The open eyes this nearer darkling air,  
Swiftly the shining air and luminous

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* from one part to another of the same curved surface.

Followeth in, which purges then the eyes  
 And scatters asunder of that other air  
 The sable shadows, for in large degrees  
 This air is nimbler, nicer, and more strong.  
 And soon as ever 'thas filled and oped with light  
 The pathways of the eyeballs, which before  
 Black air had blocked, there follow straightaway  
 Those films of things out-standing in the light,  
 Provoking vision—what we cannot do  
 From out the light with objects in the dark,  
 Because that denser darkling air behind  
 Followeth in, and fills each aperture  
 And thus blockades the pathways of the eyes  
 That there no images of any things  
 Can be thrown in and agitate the eyes.

And when from far away we do behold  
 The squarèd towers of a city, oft  
 Rounded they seem,—on this account because  
 Each distant angle is perceived obtuse,  
 Or rather it is not perceived at all ;  
 And perishes its blow nor to our gaze  
 Arrives its stroke, since through such length of air  
 Are borne along the idols that the air  
 Makes blunt the idol of the angle's point  
 By numerous collidings. When thuswise  
 The angles of the tower each and all  
 Have quite escaped the sense, the stones appear  
 As rubbed and rounded on a turner's wheel—  
 Yet not like objects near and truly round,  
 But with a semblance to them, shadowily.  
 Likewise, our shadow in the sun appears  
 To move along and follow our own steps  
 And imitate our carriage—if thou thinkest  
 Air that is thus bereft of light can walk,  
 Following the gait and motion of mankind.

For what we use to name a shadow, sure  
Is naught but air deprived of light. No marvel :  
Because the earth from spot to spot is reft  
Progressively of light of sun, whenever  
In moving round we get within its way,  
While any spot of earth by us abandoned  
Is filled with light again, on this account  
It comes to pass that what was body's shadow  
Seems still the same to follow after us  
In one straight course. Since, evermore pour in  
New lights of rays, and perish then the old,  
Just like the wool that's drawn into the flame.  
Therefore the earth is easily spoiled of light  
And easily refilled and from herself  
Washeth the black shadows quite away.

And yet in this we don't at all concede †  
That eyes be cheated. For their task it is  
To note in whatsoever place be light,  
In what be shadow : whether or no the gleams  
Be still the same, and whether the shadow which  
Just now was here is that one passing thither,  
Or whether the facts be what we said above,  
'Tis after all the reasoning of mind  
That must decide ; nor can our eyeballs know  
The nature of reality. And so  
Attach thou not this fault of mind to eyes,  
Nor lightly think our senses everywhere  
Are tottering. The ship in which we sail  
Is borne along, although it seems to stand ;  
The ship that bides in roadstead is supposed  
There to be passing by. And hills and fields  
Seem fleeing fast astern, past which we urge  
The ship and fly under the bellying sails.  
The stars, each one, do seem to pause, affixed  
To the ethereal caverns, though they all

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Forever are in motion, rising out  
 And thence revisiting their far descents  
 When they have measured with their bodies bright  
 The span of heaven. And likewise sun and moon  
 Seem biding in a roadstead,—objects which,  
 As plain fact proves, are really borne along.  
 Between two mountains far away aloft  
 From midst the whirl of waters open lies  
 A gaping exit for the fleet, and yet  
 They seem conjoinèd in a single isle.  
 When boys themselves have stopped their spinning  
     round,  
 The halls still seem to whirl and posts to reel,  
 Until they now must almost think the roofs  
 Threaten to ruin down upon their heads.  
 And now, when nature begins to lift on high  
 The sun's red splendour and the tremulous fires,  
 And raise him o'er the mountain-tops, those mountains—  
 O'er which he seemeth then to thee to be,  
 His glowing self hard by atingeing them  
 With his own fire—are yet away from us  
 Scarcely two thousand arrow-shots, indeed  
 Oft scarce five hundred courses of a dart ;  
 Although between those mountains and the sun  
 Lie the huge plains of ocean spread beneath  
 The vasty shores of ether, and intervene  
 A thousand lands, possessed by many a folk  
 And generations of wild beasts. Again,  
 A pool of water of but a finger's depth,  
 Which lies between the stones along the pave,  
 Offers a vision downward into earth  
 As far, as from the earth o'erspread on high  
 The gulfs of heaven ; that thus thou seemest to view  
 Clouds down below and heavenly bodies plunged  
 Wondrously in heaven under earth.

Then too, when in the middle of the stream  
Sticks fast our dashing horse, and down we gaze  
Into the river's rapid waves, some force  
Seems then to bear the body of the horse,  
Though standing still, reversely from his course,  
And swiftly push up-stream. And wheresoe'er  
We cast our eyes across, all objects seem  
Thus to be onward borne and flow along  
In the same way as we. A portico,  
Albeit it stands well propped from end to end  
On equal columns, parallel and big,  
Contracts by stages in a narrow cone,  
When from one end the long, long whole is seen,—  
Until, conjoining ceiling with the floor,  
And the whole right side with the left, it draws  
Together to a cone's nigh-viewless point.  
To sailors on the main the sun he seems  
From out the waves to rise, and in the waves  
To set and bury his light—because indeed  
They gaze on naught but water and the sky.  
Again, to gazers ignorant of the sea,  
Vessels in port seem, as with broken poops,  
To lean upon the water, quite agog ;  
For any portion of the oars that's raised  
Above the briny spray is straight, and straight  
The rudders from above. But other parts,  
Those sunk, immersed below the water-line,  
Seem broken all and bended and inclined  
Sloping to upwards, and turned back to float  
Almost atop the water. And when the winds  
Carry the scattered drifts along the sky  
In the night-time, then seem to glide along  
The radiant constellations 'gainst the clouds  
And there on high to take far other course  
From that whereon in truth they're borne. And then,

If haply our hand be set beneath one eye  
 And press below thereon, then to our gaze  
 Each object which we gaze on seems to be,  
 By some sensation twain—then twain the lights  
 Of lampions burgeoning in flowers of flame,  
 And twain the furniture in all the house,  
 Two-fold the visages of fellow-men,  
 And twain their bodies. And again, when sleep  
 Has bound our members down in slumber soft  
 And all the body lies in deep repose,  
 Yet then we seem to self to be awake  
 And move our members ; and in night's blind gloom  
 We think to mark the daylight and the sun ;  
 And, shut within a room, yet still we seem  
 To change our skies, our oceans, rivers, hills,  
 To cross the plains afoot, and hear new sounds,  
 Though still the austere silence of the night  
 Abides around us, and to speak replies,  
 Though voiceless. Other cases of the sort  
 Wondrously many do we see, which all  
Seek, so to say, to injure faith in sense—  
 In vain, because the largest part of these  
Deceives through mere opinions of the mind,  
Which we do add ourselves, feigning to see  
 What by the senses are not seen at all.  
 For naught is harder than to separate  
 Plain facts from dubious, which the mind forthwith  
 Adds by itself.

Again, if one suppose  
 That naught is known, he knows not whether this  
 Itself is able to be known, since he  
 Confesses naught to know. Therefore with him  
 I waive discussion—who has set his head  
 Even where his feet should be. But let me grant  
 That this he knows,—I question : whence he knows

What 'tis to know and not-to-know in turn,  
 And what created concept of the truth,  
 And what device has proved the dubious  
 To differ from the certain ?—since in things  
 He's heretofore seen naught of true. Thou'lt find  
 That from the senses first hath been create  
 Concept of truth, nor can the senses be  
 Rebutted. For criterion must be found  
 Worthy of greater trust, which shall defeat  
 Through own authority the false by true ;  
 What, then, than these our senses must there be  
 Worthy a greater trust ? Shall reason, sprung  
 From some false sense, prevail to contradict  
 Those senses, sprung as reason wholly is  
 From out the senses ?—For lest *these* be true,  
 All reason also then is falsified.  
 Or shall the ears have power to blame the eyes,  
 Or yet the touch the ears ? Again, shall taste  
 Accuse this touch or shall the nose confute  
 Or eyes defeat it ? Methinks not so it is ;  
 For unto each has been divided off  
 Its function quite apart, its power to each ;  
 And thus we're still constrainèd to perceive  
 The soft, the cold, the hot apart, apart  
 All divers hues and whatso things there be  
 Conjoined with hues. Likewise the tasting tongue  
 Has its own power apart, and smells apart  
 And sounds apart are known.<sup>1</sup> And thus it is  
 That no one sense can e'er convict another.  
 Nor shall one sense have power to blame itself,  
 Because it always must be deemed the same,  
 Worthy of equal trust. And therefore what  
 At any time unto these senses showed,

<sup>1</sup> *Noscuntur*, Guissani's footnote suggestion for *nascuntur* (engendered).

The same is true. And if the reason be  
 Unable to unravel us the cause  
 Why objects, which at hand were square, afar  
 Seemed rounded, yet it more availeth us,  
 Lacking the reason, to pretend a cause  
 For each configuration, than to let  
 From out our hands escape the obvious things  
 And injure primal faith in sense, and wreck  
 All those foundations upon which do rest  
 Our life and safety. For not only reason  
 Would topple down ; but even our very life  
Would straightaway collapse, unless we dared  
To trust our senses and to keep away  
 From headlong heights and places to be shunned  
 Of a like peril, and to seek with speed  
 Their opposites ! Again, as in a building,  
 If the first plumb-line be askew, and if  
 The square deceiving swerve from lines exact,  
 And if the level waver but the least  
 In any part, the whole construction then  
 Must turn out faulty—shelving and askew,  
 Leaning to back and front, incongruous,  
 That now some portions seem about to fall,  
 And falls the whole ere long—betrayed indeed  
 By first deceiving estimates : so too  
 Thy calculations in affairs of life  
 Must be askew and false, if sprung for thee  
 From senses false. So all that troop of words  
 Marshalled against the senses is quite vain.

And now remains to demonstrate with ease  
 How other senses each their things perceive.

Firstly, a sound and every voice is heard,  
 When, getting into ears, they strike the sense  
 With their own body. For confess we must  
Even voice and sound to be corporeal,



Because they're able on the sense to strike.  
 Besides voice often scrapes against the throat,  
 And screams in going out do make more rough  
 The wind-pipe—naturally enough, methinks,  
 When, through the narrow exit rising up  
 In larger throng, these primal germs of voice  
 Have thus begun to issue forth. In sooth,  
 Also the door of the mouth is scraped against  
 [By air blown outward] from distended [cheeks].

And thus no doubt there is, that voice and words  
 Consist of elements corporeal,  
 With power to pain. Nor art thou unaware  
 Likewise how much of body's ta'en away,  
 How much from very thews and powers of men  
 May be withdrawn by steady talk, prolonged  
 Even from the rising splendour of the morn  
 To shadows of black evening,—above all  
 If 't be outpoured with most exceeding shouts.  
 Therefore the voice must be corporeal,  
 Since the long talker loses from his frame  
 A part.

Moreover, roughness in the sound  
 Comes from the roughness in the primal germs,  
 As a smooth sound from smooth ones is create ;  
 Nor have these elements a form the same  
 When the trump rumbles with a hollow roar,  
 As when barbaric Berecynthian pipe  
 Buzzes with raucous boomings, or when swans  
 By night from icy shores of Helicon  
 With wailing voices raise their liquid dirge.

Thus, when from deep within our frame we force  
 These voices, and at mouth expel them forth,  
 The mobile tongue, artificer of words,  
 Makes them articulate, and too the lips

By their formations share in shaping them.  
 Hence when the space is short from starting-point  
 To where that voice arrives, the very words  
 Must too be plainly heard, distinctly marked.  
 For then the voice conserves its own formation,  
 Conserves its shape. But if the space between  
 Be longer than is fit, the words must be  
 Through the much air confounded, and the voice  
 Disordered in its flight across the winds—  
 And so it haps, that thou canst sound perceive,  
 Yet not determine what the words may mean ;  
 To such degree confounded and encumbered  
 The voice approaches us. Again, one word,  
 Sent from the crier's mouth, may rouse all ears  
 Among the populace. And thus one voice  
 Scatters asudden into many voices,  
 Since it divides itself for separate ears,  
 Imprinting form of word and a clear tone.  
 But whatso part of voices fails to hit  
 The ears themselves perishes, borne beyond,  
 Idly diffused among the winds. A part,  
 Beating on solid porticoes, tossed back  
 Returns a sound ; and sometimes mocks the ear  
 With a mere phantom of a word. When this  
 Thou well hast noted, thou canst render count  
 Unto thyself and others why it is  
 Along the lonely places that the rocks  
 Give back like shapes of words in order like,  
 When search we after comrades wandering  
 Among the shady mountains, and aloud  
 Call unto them, the scattered. I have seen  
 Spots that gave back even voices six or seven  
 For one thrown forth—for so the very hills,  
 Dashing them back against the hills, kept on  
 With their reverberations. And these spots

The neighbouring country-side doth feign to be  
 Haunts of the goat-foot satyrs and the nymphs ;  
 And tells ye there be fauns, by whose night noise  
 And antic revels yonder they declare  
 The voiceless silences are broken oft,  
 And tones of strings are made and wailings sweet  
 Which the pipe, beat by players' finger-tips,  
 Pours out ; and far and wide the farmer-race  
 Begins to hear, when, shaking the garmentings  
 Of pine upon his half-beast head, god-Pan  
 With puckered lip oft runneth o'er and o'er  
 The open reeds,—lest flute should cease to pour  
 The woodland music ! Other prodigies  
 And wonders of this ilk they love to tell,  
 Lest they be thought to dwell in lonely spots  
 And even by gods deserted. This is why  
 They boast of marvels in their story-tellings ;  
 Or by some other reason are led on—  
 Greedy, as all mankind hath ever been,  
 To prattle fables into ears.

Again,

One need not wonder how it comes about  
That through those places (through which eyes cannot  
View objects manifest) sounds yet may pass  
And assail the ears. For often we observe  
 People conversing, though the doors be closed ;  
 No marvel either, since all voice unharmed  
 Can wind through bended apertures of things,  
 While idol-films decline to—for they're rent,  
 Unless along straight apertures they swim,  
 Like those in glass, through which all images  
 Do fly across. And yet this voice itself,  
 In passing through shut chambers of a house,  
 Is dulled, and in a jumble enters ears,  
 And sound we seem to hear far more than words.

Moreover, a voice is into all directions  
 Divided up, since off from one another  
 New voices are engendered, when one voice  
 Hath once leapt forth, outstarting into many—  
 As oft a spark of fire is wont to sprinkle  
 Itself into its several fires. And so,  
 Voices do fill those places hid behind,  
 Which all are in a hubbub round about,  
 Astir with sound. But idol-films do tend,  
 As once sent forth, in straight directions all ;  
 Wherefore one can inside a wall see naught,  
 Yet catch the voices from beyond the same.

Nor tongue and palate, whereby we flavour feel,  
 Present more problems for more work of thought.  
 Firstly, we feel a flavour in the mouth,  
 When forth we squeeze it, in chewing up our food,—  
 As any one perchance begins to squeeze  
 With hand and dry a sponge with water soaked.  
 Next, all which forth we squeeze is spread about  
 Along the pores and interwinèd paths  
 Of the loose-textured tongue. And so, when smooth  
 The bodies of the oozy flavour, then  
 Delightfully they touch, delightfully  
 They treat all spots, around the wet and trickling  
 Enclosures of the tongue. And contrariwise,  
 They sting and pain the sense with their assault,  
 According as with roughness they're supplied.  
 Next, only up to palate is the pleasure  
 Coming from flavour ; for in truth when down  
 'Thas plunged along the throat, no pleasure is,  
 Whilst into all the frame it spreads around ;  
 Nor aught it matters with what food is fed  
 The body, if only what thou take thou canst  
 Distribute well digested to the frame  
 And keep the stomach in a moist career.

Now, how it is we see some food for some,  
Other for others . . .

I will unfold, or wherefore what to some  
Is foul and bitter, yet the same to others *butter mil*  
Can seem delectable to eat,—why here  
So great the distance and the difference is  
That what is food to one to some becomes  
Fierce poison, as a certain snake there is  
Which, touched by spittle of a man, will waste  
And end itself by gnawing up its coil.  
Again, fierce poison is the hellebore  
To us, but puts the fat on goats and quails.  
That thou mayst know by what devices this  
Is brought about, in chief thou must recall  
What we have said before, that seeds are kept  
Commixed in things in divers modes. Again,  
As all the breathing creatures which take food  
Are outwardly unlike, and outer cut  
And contour of their members bounds them round,  
Each differing kind by kind, they thus consist  
Of seeds of varying shape. And furthermore,  
Since seeds do differ, divers too must be  
The interstices and paths (which we do call  
The apertures) in all the members, even  
In mouth and palate too. Thus some must be  
More small or yet more large, three-cornered some  
And others squared, and many others round,  
And certain of them many-angled too  
In many modes. For, as the combination  
And motion of their divers shapes demand,  
The shapes of apertures must be diverse  
And paths must vary according to their walls  
That bound them. Hence when what is sweet to some,  
Becomes to others bitter, for him to whom

'Tis sweet, the smoothest particles must needs  
 Have entered caressingly the palate's pores.  
 And, contrariwise, with those to whom that sweet  
 Is sour within the mouth, beyond a doubt  
 The rough and barbèd particles have got  
 Into the narrows of the apertures.  
 Now easy it is from these affairs to know  
 Whatever . . .

Indeed, where one from o'er-abundant bile  
 Is stricken with fever, or in other wise  
 Feels the roused violence of some malady,  
 There the whole frame is now upset, and there  
 All the positions of the seeds are changed,—  
 So that the bodies which before were fit  
 To cause the savour, now are fit no more,  
 And now more apt are others which be able  
 To get within the pores and gender sour.  
 Both sorts, in sooth, are intermixed in honey—  
 What oft we've proved above to thee before.

Now come, and I will indicate what wise  
Impact of odour on the nostrils touches.  
 And first, 'tis needful there be many things  
 From whence the streaming flow of varied odours  
 May roll along, and we're constrained to think  
 They stream and dart and sprinkle themselves about  
 Impartially. But for some breathing creatures  
 One odour is more apt, to others another—  
 Because of differing forms of seeds and pores.  
 Thus on and on along the zephyrs bees  
 Are led by odour of honey, vultures too  
 By carcasses. Again, the forward power  
 Of scent in dogs doth lead the hunter on  
 Whithersoever the splay-foot of wild beast  
 Hath hastened its career; and the white goose,

The saviour of the Roman citadel,  
 Forescents afar the odour of mankind.  
 Thus, diversly to divers ones is given  
 Peculiar smell that leadeth each along  
 To his own food or makes him start aback  
 From loathsome poison, and in this wise are  
 The generations of the wild preserved.

Yet is this pungence not alone in odours  
 Or in the class of flavours ; but, likewise,  
The look of things and hues agree not all  
 So well with senses unto all, but that  
 Some unto some will be, to gaze upon,  
 More keen and painful. Lo, the raving lions,  
 They dare not face and gaze upon the cock  
 Who's wont with wings to flap away the night  
 From off the stage,<sup>1</sup> and call the beaming morn  
 With clarion voice—and lions straightway thus  
 Bethink themselves of flight, because, ye see,  
 Within the body of the cocks there be  
 Some certain seeds, which, into lions' eyes  
 Injected, bore into the pupils deep  
 And yield such piercing pain they can't hold out  
 Against the cocks, however fierce they be—  
 Whilst yet these seeds can't hurt our gaze the least,  
 Either because they do not penetrate,  
 Or since they have free exit from the eyes  
 As soon as penetrating, so that thus  
 They cannot hurt our eyes in any part  
 By there remaining.

To speak once more of odour ;  
 Whatever assail the nostrils, some can travel  
 A longer way than others. None of them,  
However, 's borne so far as sound or voice—  
 While I omit all mention of such things

*i.e.* like a bad actor at the uproar of angry spectators.

As hit the eyesight and assail the vision.  
 For slowly on a wandering course it comes  
 And perishes sooner, by degrees absorbed  
 Easily into all the winds of air ;—  
 And first, because from deep inside the thing  
 It is discharged with labour (for the fact  
 That every object, when 'tis shivered, ground,  
 Or crumbled by the fire, will smell the stronger  
 Is sign that odours flow and part away  
 From inner regions of the things). And next,  
 Thou mayest see that odour is create  
 Of larger primal germs than voice, because  
 It enters not through stony walls, wherethrough  
 Unfailingly the voice and sound are borne ;  
 Wherefore, besides, thou wilt observe 'tis not  
 So easy to trace out in whatso place  
 The smelling object is. For, dallying on  
 Along the winds, the particles cool off,  
 And then the scurrying messengers of things  
 Arrive our senses, when no longer hot.  
 So dogs oft wander astray, and hunt the scent.

Now mark, and hear what objects move the mind,  
 And learn, in few, whence unto intellect  
 Do come what come. And first I tell thee this :  
 That many images of objects rove  
 In many modes to every region round—  
 So thin that easily the one with other,  
 When once they meet, uniteth in mid-air,  
 Like gossamer or gold-leaf. For, indeed,  
 Far thinner are they in their fabric than  
 Those images which take a hold on eyes  
 And smite the vision, since through body's pores  
 They penetrate, and inwardly stir up  
 The subtle nature of mind and smite the sense.  
 Thus, Centaurs and the limbs of Scyllas, thus



The Cerberus-visages of dogs we see,  
 And images of people gone before—  
 Dead men whose bones earth bosomed long ago ;  
 Because the images of every kind  
 Are everywhere about us borne—in part  
 Those which are gendered in the very air  
 Of own accord, in part those others which  
 From divers things do part away, and those  
 Which are compounded, made from out their shapes.  
 For soothly from no living Centaur is  
 That phantom gendered, since no breed of beast  
 Like him was ever ; but, when images  
 Of horse and man by chance have come together,  
 They easily cohere, as aforesaid,  
 At once, through subtle nature and fabric thin.  
 In the same fashion others of this ilk  
 Created are. And when they're quickly borne  
 In their exceeding lightness, easily  
 (As earlier I showed) one subtle image,  
 Compounded, moves by its one blow the mind,  
 Itself so subtle and so strangely quick.

That these things come to pass as I record,  
 From *this* thou easily canst understand :  
 So far as one is unto other like,  
 Seeing with mind as well as with the eyes  
 Must come to pass in fashion not unlike.  
 Well, now, since I have shown that I perceive  
 Haply a lion through those idol-films  
 Such as assail my eyes, 'tis thine to know  
 Also the mind is in like manner moved,  
 And sees, nor more nor less than eyes do see  
 (Except that it perceives more subtle films)  
 The lion and aught else through idol-films.  
 And when the sleep has overset our frame,  
 The mind's intelligence is now awake,

Still for no other reason, save that these—  
 The self-same films as when we are awake—  
 Assail our minds, to such degree indeed  
 That we do seem to see for sure the man  
 Whom, void of life, now death and earth have gained  
 Dominion over. And nature forces this  
 To come to pass because the body's senses  
 Are resting, thwarted through the members all,  
 Unable now to conquer false with true ;  
 And memory lies prone and languishes  
 In slumber, nor protests that he, the man  
 Whom the mind feigns to see alive, long since  
 Hath been the gain of death and dissolution.

And further, 'tis no marvel idols move  
 And toss their arms and other members round  
 In rhythmic time—and often in men's sleeps  
 It haps an image this is seen to do ;  
 In sooth, when perishes the former image,  
 And other is gendered of another pose,  
 That former seemeth to have changed its gestures.  
 Of course the change must be conceived as speedy ;  
 So great the swiftness and so great the store  
 Of idol-things, and (in an instant brief  
 As mind can mark) so great, again, the store  
 Of separate idol-parts to bring supplies.

It happens also that there is supplied  
 Sometimes an image not of kind the same ;  
 But what before was woman, now at hand  
 Is seen to stand there, altered into male ;  
 Or other visage, other age succeeds ;  
 But slumber and oblivion take care  
 That we shall feel no wonder at the thing.

And much in these affairs demands inquiry,  
 And much, illumination—if we crave  
 With plainness to exhibit facts. And first,

Why doth the mind of one to whom the whim  
To think has come behold forthwith that thing ?  
Or do the idols watch upon our will,  
And doth an image unto us occur,  
Directly we desire—if heart prefer  
The sea, the land, or after all the sky ?  
Assemblies of the citizens, parades,  
Banquets, and battles, these and all doth she,  
Nature, create and furnish at our word ?—  
Maugre the fact that in same place and spot  
Another's mind is meditating things  
All far unlike. And what, again, of this :  
When we in sleep behold the idols step,  
In measure, forward, moving supple limbs,  
Whilst forth they put each supple arm in turn  
With speedy motion, and with eyeing heads  
Repeat the movement, as the foot keeps time ?  
Forsooth, the idols they are steeped in art,  
And wander to and fro well taught indeed,—  
Thus to be able in the time of night  
To make such games ! Or will the truth be this :  
Because in one least moment that we mark—  
That is, the uttering of a single sound—  
There lurk yet many moments, which the reason  
Discovers to exist, therefore it comes  
That, in a moment how so brief ye will,  
The divers idols are hard by, and ready  
Each in its place diverse ? So great the swiftness,  
So great, again, the store of idol-things,  
And so, when perishes the former image,  
And other is gendered of another pose,  
The former seemeth to have changed its gestures.  
And since they be so tenuous, mind can mark  
Sharply alone the ones it strains to see ;  
And thus the rest do perish one and all,

Save those for which the mind prepares itself.  
 Further, it doth prepare itself indeed,  
 And hopes to see what follows after each—  
 Hence this result. For hast thou not observed  
 How eyes, essaying to perceive the fine,  
 Will strain in preparation, otherwise  
 Unable sharply to perceive at all ?  
 Yet know thou canst that, even in objects plain,  
 If thou attendest not, 'tis just the same  
 As if 'twere all the time removed and far.  
 What marvel, then, that mind doth lose the rest,  
 Save those to which 'thas given up itself ?  
 So 'tis that we conjecture from small signs  
 Things wide and weighty, and involve ourselves  
 In snarls of self-deceit.

#### SOME VITAL FUNCTIONS—820-1049

In these affairs

We crave that thou wilt passionately flee  
 The one offence, and anxiously wilt shun  
 The error of presuming the clear lights  
 Of eyes created were that we might see ;  
 Or thighs and knees, apropos upon the feet,  
 Thuswise can bended be, that we might step  
 With goodly strides ahead ; or forearms joined  
 Unto the sturdy uppers, or serving hands  
 On either side were given, that we might do  
 Life's own demands. All such interpretation  
 Is aft-for-fore with inverse reasoning,  
 Since naught is born in body so that we  
 May use the same, but birth engenders use :  
 No seeing ere the lights of eyes were born,  
 No speaking ere the tongue created was ;  
 But origin of tongue came long before

Discourse of words, and ears created were  
Much earlier than any sound was heard ;  
And all the members, so meseems, were there  
Before they got their use : and therefore, they  
Could not be gendered for the sake of use.  
But contrariwise, contending in the fight  
With hand to hand, and rending of the joints,  
And fouling of the limbs with gore, was there,  
O long before the gleaming spears ere flew ;  
And nature prompted man to shun a wound,  
Before the left arm by the aid of art  
Opposed the shielding targe. And, verily,  
Yielding the weary body to repose,  
Far ancients than cushions of soft beds,  
And quenching thirst is earlier than cups.  
These objects, therefore, which for use and life  
Have been devised, can be conceived as found  
For sake of using. But apart from such  
Are all which first were born and afterwards  
Gave knowledge of their own utility—  
Chief in which sort we note the senses, limbs :  
Wherefore, again, 'tis quite beyond thy power  
To hold that these could thus have been create  
For office of utility.

Likewise,

'Tis nothing strange that all the breathing creatures  
Seek, even by nature of their frame, their food.  
Yes, since I've taught thee that from off the things  
Stream and depart innumerable bodies  
In modes innumerable too ; but most  
Must be the bodies streaming from the living—  
Which bodies, vexed by motion evermore,  
Are through the mouth exhaled innumerable,  
When weary creatures pant, or through the sweat  
Squeezed forth innumerable from deep within.

Thus body rarefies, so undermined  
 In all its nature, and pain attends its state.  
 And so the food is taken to underprop  
 The tottering joints, and by its interfusion  
 To re-create their powers, and there stop up  
 The longing, open-mouthed through limbs and veins,  
 For eating. And the moist no less departs  
 Into all regions that demand the moist ;  
 And many heaped-up particles of hot,  
 Which cause such burnings in these bellies of ours,  
 The liquid on arriving dissipates  
 And quenches like a fire, that parching heat  
 No longer now can scorch the frame. And so,  
 Thou seest how panting thirst is washed away  
 From off our body, how the hunger-pang  
 Is, too, appeased.

Now, how it comes that we,  
 Whene'er we wish, can step with strides ahead,  
 And how 'tis given to move our limbs about,  
 And what device is wont to push ahead  
 This the big load of our corporeal frame,  
 I'll say to thee—do thou attend what's said.  
 I say that first some idol-films of walking  
 Into our mind do fall and smite the mind,  
 As said before. Thereafter will arises ;  
 For no one starts to do a thing, before  
 The intellect pre-visions what it wills ;  
 And what it there pre-visioneth depends  
 On what that image is. When, therefore, mind  
 Doth so bestir itself that it doth will  
 To go and step along, it strikes at once  
 That energy of soul that's sown about  
 In all the body through the limbs and frame—  
 And this is easy of performance, since  
 The soul is close conjoinèd with the mind.

Next, soul in turn strikes body, and by degrees  
Thus the whole mass is pushed along and moved.  
Then too the body rarefies, and air,  
Forsooth as ever of such nimbleness,  
Comes on and penetrates aboundingly  
Through opened pores, and thus is sprinkled round  
Unto all smallest places in our frame.  
Thus then by these twain factors, severally,  
Body is borne like ship with oars and wind.  
Nor yet in these affairs is aught for wonder  
That particles so fine can whirl around  
So great a body and turn this weight of ours ;  
For wind, so tenuous with its subtle body,  
Yet pushes, driving on the mighty ship  
Of mighty bulk ; one hand directs the same,  
Whatever its momentum, and one helm  
Whirls it around, whither ye please ; and loads,  
Many and huge, are moved and hoisted high  
By enginery of pulley-blocks and wheels,  
With but light strain.

Now, by what modes this sleep  
Pours through our members waters of repose  
And frees the breast from cares of mind, I'll tell  
In verses sweeter than they many are ;  
Even as the swan's slight note is better far  
Than that dispersèd clamour of the cranes  
Among the southwind's aery clouds. Do thou  
Give me sharp ears and a sagacious mind,—  
That thou mayst not deny the things to be  
Whereof I'm speaking, nor depart away  
With bosom scorning these the spoken truths,  
Thyself at fault unable to perceive.  
Sleep chiefly comes when energy of soul  
Hath now been scattered through the frame, and part  
Expelled abroad and gone away, and part

Crammed back and settling deep within the frame—  
 Whereafter then our loosened members droop.  
 For doubt is none that by the work of soul  
 Exists in us this sense, and when by slumber  
 That sense is thwarted, we are bound to think  
 The soul confounded and expelled abroad—  
 Yet not entirely, else the frame would lie  
 Drenched in the everlasting cold of death.  
 In sooth, where no one part of soul remained  
 Lurking among the members, even as fire  
 Lurks buried under many ashes, whence  
 Could sense amain rekindled be in members,  
 As flame can rise anew from unseen fire ?

By what devices this strange state and new  
 May be occasioned, and by what the soul  
 Can be confounded and the frame grow faint,  
 I will untangle : see to it, thou, that I  
 Pour forth my words not unto empty winds.  
 In first place, body on its outer parts—  
 Since these are touched by neighbouring aery gusts—  
 Must there be thumped and strook by blows of air  
 Repeatedly. And therefore almost all  
 Are covered either with hides, or else with shells,  
 Or with the horny callus, or with bark.  
 Yet this same air lashes their inner parts,  
 When creatures draw a breath or blow it out.  
 Wherefore, since body thus is flogged alike  
 Upon the inside and the out, and blows  
 Come in upon us through the little pores  
 Even inward to our body's primal parts  
 And primal elements, there comes to pass  
 By slow degrees, along our members then,  
 A kind of overthrow ; for then confounded  
 Are those arrangements of the primal germs  
 Of body and of mind. It comes to pass



That next a part of soul's expelled abroad,  
 A part retreateth in recesses hid,  
 A part, too, scattered all about the frame,  
 Cannot become united nor engage  
 In interchange of motion. Nature now  
 So hedges off approaches and the paths ;  
 And thus the sense, its motions all deranged,  
 Retires down deep within ; and since there's naught,  
 As 'twere, to prop the frame, the body weakens,  
 And all the members languish, and the arms  
 And eyelids fall, and, as ye lie abed,  
 Even there the houghs will sag and loose their powers.  
 Again, sleep follows after food, because  
 The food produces same result as air,  
 Whilst being scattered round through all the veins ;  
 And much the heaviest is that slumber which,  
 Full or fatigued, thou takest ; since 'tis then  
 That the most bodies disarrange themselves,  
 Bruisèd by labours hard. And in same wise,  
 This three-fold change : a forcing of the soul  
 Down deeper, more a casting-forth of it,  
 A moving more divided in its parts  
 And scattered more.

And to whate'er pursuit  
 A man most clings absorbed, or what the affairs  
 On which we theretofore have tarried much,  
 And mind hath strained upon the more, we seem  
 In sleep not rarely to go at the same.  
 The lawyers seem to plead and cite decrees,  
 Commanders they to fight and go at frays,  
 Sailors to live in combat with the winds,  
 And we ourselves indeed to make this book,  
 And still to seek the nature of the world  
 And set it down, when once discovered, here  
 In these my country's leaves. Thus all pursuits,

All arts in general seem in sleeps to mock  
And master the minds of men. And whosoever  
Day after day for long to games have given  
Attention undivided, still they keep  
(As oft we note), even when they've ceased to grasp  
Those games with their own senses, open paths  
Within the mind wherethrough the idol-films  
Of just those games can come. And thus it is  
For many a day thereafter those appear  
Floating before the eyes, that even awake  
They think they view the dancers moving round  
Their supple limbs, and catch with both the ears  
The liquid song of harp and speaking chords,  
And view the same assembly on the seats,  
And manifold bright glories of the stage—  
So great the influence of pursuit and zest,  
And of the affairs wherein 'thas been the wont  
Of men to be engaged—nor only men,  
But soothly all the animals. Behold,  
Thou'lt see the sturdy horses, though outstretched,  
Yet sweating in their sleep, and panting ever,  
And straining utmost strength, as if for prize,  
As if, with barriers opened now . . .  
And hounds of huntsmen oft in soft repose  
Yet toss asudden all their legs about,  
And growl and bark, and with their nostrils sniff  
The winds again, again, as though indeed  
They'd caught the scented foot-prints of wild beasts,  
And, even when wakened, often they pursue  
The phantom images of stags, as though  
They did perceive them fleeing on before,  
Until the illusion's shaken off and dogs  
Come to themselves again. And fawning breed  
Of house-bred whelps do feel the sudden urge  
To shake their bodies and start from off the ground,

As if beholding stranger-visages.  
And ever the fiercer be the stock, the more  
In sleep the same is ever bound to rage.  
But flee the divers tribes of birds and vex  
With sudden wings by night the groves of gods,  
When in their gentle slumbers they have dreamed  
Of hawks in chase, aswooping on for fight.  
Again, the minds of mortals which perform  
With mighty motions mighty enterprises,  
Often in sleep will do and dare the same  
In manner like. Kings take the towns by storm,  
Succumb to capture, battle on the field,  
Raise a wild cry as if their throats were cut  
Even then and there. And many wrestle on  
And groan with pains, and fill all regions round  
With mighty cries and wild, as if then gnawed  
By fangs of panther or of lion fierce.  
Many amid their slumbers talk about  
Their mighty enterprises, and have often  
Enough become the proof of their own crimes.  
Many meet death ; many, as if headlong  
From lofty mountains tumbling down to earth  
With all their frame, are frenzied in their fright ;  
And after sleep, as if still mad in mind,  
They scarce come to, confounded as they are  
By ferment of their frame. The thirsty man,  
Likewise, he sits beside delightful spring  
Or river and gulpeth down with gaping throat  
Nigh the whole stream. And oft the innocent young,  
By sleep o'ermastered, think they lift their dress  
By pail or public jordan and then void  
The water filtered down their frame entire  
And drench the Babylonian coverlets,  
Magnificently bright. Again, those males  
Into the surging channels of whose years

Now first has passed the seed (engenderèd  
 Within their members by the ripened days)  
 Are in their sleep confronted from without  
 By idol-images of some fair form—  
 Tidings of glorious face and lovely bloom,  
 Which stir and goad the regions turgid now  
 With seed abundant ; so that, as it were  
 With all the matter acted duly out,  
 They pour the billows of a potent stream  
 And stain their garment.

And as said before,  
 That seed is roused in us when once ripe age  
 Has made our body strong . . .

. . . . .

As divers causes give to divers things  
 Impulse and irritation, so one force  
 In human kind rouses the human seed  
 To spurt from man. As soon as ever it issues,  
 Forced from its first abodes, it passes down  
 In the whole body through the limbs and frame,  
 Meeting in certain regions of our thews,  
 And stirs amain the genitals of man.  
 The goaded regions swell with seed, and then  
 Comes the delight to dart the same at what  
 The mad desire so yearns, and body seeks  
 That object, whence the mind by love is pierced.  
 For well-nigh each man falleth toward his wound,  
 And our blood spurts even toward the spot from whence  
 The stroke wherewith we are strook, and if indeed  
 The foe be close, the red jet reaches him.  
 Thus, one who gets a stroke from Venus' shafts—  
 Whether a boy with limbs effeminate  
 Assault him, or a woman darting love  
 From all her body—that one strains to get  
 Even to the thing whereby he's hit, and longs

To join with it and cast into its frame  
The fluid drawn even from within its own.  
For the mute craving doth presage delight.

## THE PASSION OF LOVE—1050—1279

This craving 'tis that's Venus unto us :  
From this, engender all the lures of love,  
From this, O first hath into human hearts  
Trickled that drop of joyance which ere long  
Is by chill care succeeded. Since, indeed,  
Though she thou lovest now be far away,  
Yet idol-images of her are near  
And the sweet name is floating in thy ear.  
But it behooves to flee those images ;  
And scare afar whatever feeds thy love ;  
And turn elsewhere thy mind ; and vent the sperm,  
Within thee gathered, into sundry bodies,  
Nor, with thy thoughts still busied with one love,  
Keep it for one delight, and so store up  
Care for thyself and pain inevitable.  
For, lo, the ulcer just by nourishing  
Grows to more life with deep inveteracy,  
And day by day the fury swells aflame,  
And the woe waxes heavier day by day—  
Unless thou dost destroy even by new blows  
The former wounds of love, and curest them  
While yet they're fresh, by wandering freely round  
After the freely-wandering Venus, or  
Canst lead elsewhere the tumults of thy mind.

Nor doth that man who keeps away from love  
Yet lack the fruits of Venus ; rather takes  
Those pleasures which are free of penalties.  
For the delights of Venus, verily,  
Are more unmixed for mortals sane-of-soul

Than for those sick-at-heart with love-pining.  
Yea, in the very moment of possessing,  
Surges the heat of lovers to and fro,  
Restive, uncertain ; and they cannot fix  
On what to first enjoy with eyes and hands.  
The parts they sought for, those they squeeze so tight,  
And pain the creature's body, close their teeth  
Often against her lips, and smite with kiss  
Mouth into mouth,—because this same delight  
Is not unmixed ; and underneath are stings  
Which goad a man to hurt the very thing,  
Whate'er it be, from whence arise for him  
Those germs of madness. But with gentle touch  
Venus subdues the pangs in midst of love,  
And the admixture of a fondling joy  
Doth curb the bites of passion. For they hope  
That by the very body whence they caught  
The heats of love their flames can be put out.  
But nature protests 'tis all quite otherwise ;  
For this same love it is the one sole thing  
Of which, the more we have, the fiercer burns  
The breast with fell desire. For food and drink  
Are taken within our members ; and, since they  
Can stop up certain parts, thus, easily  
Desire of water is glutted and of bread.  
But, lo, from human face and lovely bloom  
Naught penetrates our frame to be enjoyed  
Save flimsy idol-images and vain—  
A sorry hope which oft the winds disperse.  
As when the thirsty man in slumber seeks  
To drink, and water ne'er is granted him  
Wherewith to quench the heat within his members,  
But after idols of the liquids strives  
And toils in vain, and thirsts even whilst he gulps  
In middle of the torrent, thus in love

Venus deludes with idol-images  
The lovers. Nor they cannot sate their lust  
By merely gazing on the bodies, nor  
They cannot with their palms and fingers rub  
Aught from each tender limb, the while they stray  
Uncertain over all the body. Then,  
At last, with members intertwined, when they  
Enjoy the flower of their age, when now  
Their bodies have sweet presage of keen joys,  
And Venus is about to sow the fields  
Of woman, greedily their frames they lock,  
And mingle the slaver of their mouths, and breathe  
Into each other, pressing teeth on mouths—  
Yet to no purpose, since they're powerless  
To rub off aught, or penetrate and pass  
With body entire into body—for oft  
They seem to strive and struggle thus to do ;  
So eagerly they cling in Venus' bonds,  
Whilst melt away their members, overcome  
By violence of delight. But when at last  
Lust, gathered in the thews, hath spent itself,  
There comes a brief pause in the raging heat—  
But then a madness just the same returns  
And that old fury visits them again,  
When once again they seek and crave to reach  
They know not what, all powerless to find  
The artifice to subjugate the bane.  
In such uncertain state they waste away  
With unseen wound.

To which be added too,  
They squander powers and with the travail wane ;  
Be added too, they spend their futile years  
Under another's beck and call ; their duties  
Neglected languish and their honest name  
Reeleth sick, sick ; and meantime their estates

Are lost in Babylonian tapestries ;  
 And unguents and dainty Sicyonian shoes  
 Laugh on her feet ; and (as ye may be sure)  
 Big emeralds of green light are set in gold ;  
 And rich sea-purple dress by constant wear  
 Grows shabby and all soaked with Venus' sweat ;  
 And the well-earned ancestral property  
 Becometh head-bands, coifs, and many a time  
 The cloaks, or garments Alidensian  
 Or of the Cean isle. And banquets, set  
 With rarest cloth and viands, are prepared—  
 And games of chance, and many a drinking cup,  
 And unguents, crowns, and garlands. All in vain,  
 Since from amid the well-spring of delights  
 Bubbles some drop of bitter to torment  
 Among the very flowers—when haply mind  
 Gnaws into self, now stricken with remorse  
 For slothful years and ruin in baudels,  
 Or else because she's left him all in doubt  
 By launching some sly word, which still like fire  
 Lives wildly, cleaving to his eager heart ;  
 Or else because he thinks she darts her eyes  
 Too much about and gazes at another,—  
 And in her face sees traces of a laugh.

These ills are found in prospering love and true ;  
 But in crossed love and helpless there be such  
 As through shut eyelids thou canst still take in—  
 Uncounted ills ; so that 'tis better far  
 To watch beforehand, in the way I've shown,  
 And guard against enticements. For to shun  
 A fall into the hunting-snares of love  
 Is not so hard, as to get out again,  
 When tangled in the very nets, and burst  
 The stoutly-knotted cords of Aphrodite.  
 Yet even when there enmeshed with tangled feet,



Still canst thou scape the danger—lest indeed  
Thou standest in the way of thine own good,  
And overlookest first all blemishes  
Of mind and body of thy much preferred,  
Desirable dame. For so men do,  
Eyeless with passion, and assign to them  
Graces not theirs in fact. And thus we see  
Creatures in many a wise crookèd and ugly  
The prosperous sweethearts in a high esteem ;  
And lovers gird each other and advise  
To placate Venus, since their friends are smit  
With a base passion—miserable dupes  
Who seldom mark their own worst bane of all.  
The black-skinned girl is “ tawny like the honey ” ;  
The filthy and the fetid’s “ negligée ” ;  
The cat-eyed she’s “ a little Pallas,” she ;  
The sinewy and wizened’s “ a gazelle ” ;  
The pudgy and the pigmy is “ piquant,  
One of the Graces sure ” ; the big and bulky  
O she’s “ an Admiration, imposante ” ;  
The stuttering and tongue-tied “ sweetly lisps ” ;  
The mute girl’s “ modest ” ; and the garrulous,  
The spiteful spit-fire, is “ a sparkling wit ” ;  
And she who scarcely lives for scrawniness  
Becomes “ a slender darling ” ; “ delicate ”  
Is she who’s nearly dead of coughing-fit ;  
The pury female with protuberant breasts  
She is “ like Ceres when the goddess gave  
Young Bacchus suck ” ; the pug-nosed lady-love  
“ A Satyress, a feminine Silenus ” ;  
The blubber-lipped is “ all one luscious kiss ”—  
A weary while it were to tell the whole.  
But let her face possess what charm ye will,  
Let Venus’ glory rise from all her limbs,—  
Forsooth there still are others ; and forsooth

We lived before without her ; and forsooth  
 She does the same things—and we know she does—  
 All, as the ugly creature ; and she scents,  
 Yes she, her wretched self with vile perfumes ;  
 Whom even her handmaids flee and giggle at  
 Behind her back. But he, the lover, in tears  
 Because shut out, covers her threshold o'er  
 Often with flowers and garlands, and anoints  
 Her haughty door-posts with the marjoram,  
 And prints, poor fellow, kisses on the doors—  
 Admitted at last, if haply but one whiff  
 Got to him on approaching, he would seek  
 Decent excuses to go out forthwith ;  
 And his lament, long pondered, then would fall  
 Down at his heels ; and there he'd damn himself  
 For his fatuity, observing how  
 He had assigned to that same lady more—  
 Than it is proper to concede to mortals.  
 And these our Venuses are 'ware of this.  
 Wherefore the more are they at pains to hide  
 All the-behind-the-scenes of life from those  
 Whom they desire to keep in bonds of love—  
 In vain, since ne'ertheless thou canst by thought  
 Drag all the matter forth into the light  
 And well search out the cause of all these smiles ;  
 And if of graceful mind she be and kind,  
 Do thou, in thy turn, overlook the same,  
 And thus allow for poor mortality.

Nor sighs the woman always with feigned love,  
 Who links her body round man's body locked  
 And holds him fast, making his kisses wet  
 With lips sucked into lips ; for oft she acts  
 Even from desire, and, seeking mutual joys,  
 Incites him there to run love's race-course through.  
 Nor otherwise can cattle, birds, wild beasts,

And sheep and mares submit unto the males,  
Except that their own nature is in heat,  
And burns abounding and with gladness takes  
Once more the Venus of the mounting males.  
And seest thou not how those whom mutual pleasure  
Hath bound are tortured in their common bonds ?  
How often in the cross-roads dogs that pant  
To get apart strain eagerly asunder  
With utmost might ?—When all the while they're fast  
In the stout links of Venus. But they'd ne'er  
So pull, except they knew those mutual joys—  
So powerful to cast them unto snares  
And hold them bound. Wherefore again, again,  
Even as I say, there is a joint delight.

And when perchance, in mingling seed with his,  
The female hath o'erpowered the force of male  
And by a sudden fling hath seized it fast,  
Then are the offspring, more from mothers' seed,  
More like their mothers ; as, from fathers' seed,  
They're like to fathers. But whom seest to be  
Partakers of each shape, one equal blend  
Of parents' features, these are generate  
From fathers' body and from mothers' blood,  
When mutual and harmonious heat hath dashed  
Together seeds, aroused along their frames  
By Venus' goads, and neither of the twain  
Mastereth or is mastered. Happens too  
That sometimes offspring can to being come  
In likeness of their grandsires, and bring back  
Often the shapes of grandsires' sires, because  
Their parents in their bodies oft retain  
Concealèd many primal germs, commixed  
In many modes, which, starting with the stock,  
Sire handeth down to son, himself a sire ;  
Whence Venus by a variable chance

Engenders shapes, and diversly brings back  
 Ancestral features, voices too, and hair.  
 A female generation rises forth  
 From seed paternal, and from mother's body  
 Exist created males ; since sex proceeds  
 No more from singleness <sup>1</sup> of seed than faces  
 Or bodies or limbs of ours : for every birth  
 Is from a twofold seed ; and what's created  
 Hath, of that parent which it is more like,  
 More than its equal share ; as thou canst mark,—  
 Whether the breed be male or female stock.

Nor do the powers divine grudge any man  
 The fruits of his seed-sowing, so that never  
 He be called " father " by sweet children his,  
 And end his days in sterile love forever.  
 What many men suppose ; and gloomily  
 They sprinkle the altars with abundant blood,  
 And make the high platforms odorous with burnt gifts,  
 To render big by plenteous seed their wives—  
 And plague in vain godheads and sacred lots.  
 For sterile are these men by seed too thick,  
 Or else by far too watery and thin.  
 Because the thin is powerless to cleave  
 Fast to the proper places, straightaway  
 It trickles from them, and, returned again,  
 Retires abortively. And then since seed  
 More gross and solid than will suit is spent  
 By some men, either it flies not forth amain  
 With spurt prolonged enough, or else it fails  
 To enter suitably the proper places,  
 Or, having entered, the seed is weakly mixed  
 With seed of the woman : harmonies of Venus  
 Are seen to matter vastly here ; and some  
 Impregnate some more readily, and from some

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* exclusively either male or female.

Some women conceive more readily and become  
Pregnant. And many women, sterile before  
In several marriage-beds, have yet thereafter  
Obtained the mates from whom they could conceive  
The baby-boys, and with sweet progeny  
Grow rich. And even for husbands (whose own wives,  
Although of fertile wombs, have borne for them  
No babies in the house) are also found  
Concordant natures so that they at last  
Can bulwark their old age with goodly sons.  
A matter of great moment 'tis in truth,  
That seeds may mingle readily with seeds  
Suited for procreation, and that thick  
Should mix with fluid seeds, with thick the fluid.  
And in this business 'tis of some import  
Upon what diet life is nourishèd :  
For some foods thicken seeds within our members,  
And others thin them out and waste away.  
And in what modes the fond delight itself  
Is carried on—this too importeth vastly.  
For commonly 'tis thought that wives conceive  
More readily in manner of wild-beasts,  
After the custom of the four-foot breeds,  
Because so postured, with the breasts beneath  
And buttocks then upreared, the seeds can take  
Their proper places. Nor is need the least  
For wives to use the motions of blandishment ;  
For thus the woman hinders and resists  
Her own conception, if too joyously  
Herself she treats the Venus of the man  
With haunches heaving, and with all her bosom  
Now yielding like the billows of the sea—  
Aye, from the ploughshare's even course and track  
She throws the furrow, and from proper places  
Deflects the spurt of seed. And courtesans

Are thuswise wont to move for their own ends,  
To keep from pregnancy and lying in,  
And all the while to render Venus more  
A pleasure for the men—the which meseems  
Our wives have never need of.

Sometimes too

It happens—and through no divinity  
Nor arrows of Venus—that a sorry chit  
Of scanty grace will be beloved by man ;  
For sometimes she herself by very deeds,  
By her complying ways, and tidy habits,  
Will easily accustom thee to pass  
With her thy life-time—and, moreover, lo,  
Long habitude can gender human love,  
Even as an object smitten o'er and o'er  
By blows, however lightly, yet at last  
Is overcome and wavers. Seest thou not,  
Besides, how drops of water falling down  
Against the stones at last bore through the stones ?

BOOK V

## SUMMARY

Proem (1-54).

Argument of the book and new proem against the teleological concept (55-234).

I. The world is not eternal (235-415).

II. Formation of the world (416-508) and  
Astronomical questions (509-768).

III. Origins of vegetable and animal life (769-921).

IV. Origins and the savage period of mankind (922-1008).

V. Beginnings of civilisation (1009-1455).



## BOOK V

### PROEM—I-54

O WHO can build with puissant breast a song  
Worthy the majesty of these great finds ?  
Or who in words so strong that he can frame  
The fit laudations for deserts of him  
Who left us heritors of such vast prizes,  
By his own breast discovered and sought out ?—  
There shall be none, methinks, of mortal stock.  
For if must needs be named for him the name  
Demanded by the now known majesty  
Of these high matters, then a god was he,—  
Hear me, illustrious Memmius—a god ;  
Who first and chief found out that plan of life  
Which now is called philosophy, and who  
By cunning craft, out of such mighty waves,  
Out of such mighty darkness, moored life  
In havens so serene, in light so clear.  
Compare those old discoveries divine  
Of others : lo, according to the tale,  
Ceres established for mortality  
The grain, and Bacchus juice of vine-born grape,  
Though life might yet without these things abide,  
Even as report saith now some peoples live.  
But man's well-being was impossible  
Without a breast all free. Wherefore the more  
That man doth justly seem to us a god,  
From whom sweet solaces of life, afar  
Distributed o'er populous domains,  
Now soothe the minds of men. But if thou thinkest

Labours of Hercules excel the same,  
 Much farther from true reasoning thou farest.  
 For what could hurt us now that mighty maw  
 Of Nemeaeon Lion, or what the Boar  
 Who bristled in Arcadia? Or, again,  
 O what could Cretan Bull, or Hydra, pest  
 Of Lerna, fenced with vipers venomous?  
 Or what the triple-breasted power of her  
 The three-fold Geryon . . .

The sojourners in the Stymphalian fens  
 So dreadfully offend us, or the Steeds  
 Of Thracian Diomedes breathing fire  
 From out their nostrils off along the zones  
 Bistonian and Ismarian? And the Snake,  
The dread fierce gazer, guardian of the golden  
And gleaming apples of the Hesperides,  
Coiled round the tree-trunk with tremendous bulk,  
 O what, again, could he inflict on us  
 Along the Atlantic shore and wastes of sea?—  
 Where neither one of us approacheth nigh  
 Nor no barbarian ventures. And the rest  
 Of all those monsters slain, even if alive,  
 Unconquered still, what injury could they do?  
 None, as I guess. For so the gluttoned earth  
 Swarms even now with savage beasts, even now  
 Is filled with anxious terrors through the woods  
 And mighty mountains and the forest deeps—  
 Quarters 'tis ours in general to avoid.  
 But lest the breast be purged, what conflicts then,  
 What perils, must bosom, in our own despite!  
 O then how great and keen the cares of lust  
 That split the man distraught! How great the fears!  
 And lo, the pride, grim greed, and wantonness—  
 How great the slaughters in their train! and lo,

Debaucheries and every breed of sloth !  
 Therefore that man who subjugated these,  
 And from the mind expelled, by words indeed,  
 Not arms, O shall it not be seemly him  
 To dignify by ranking with the gods ?—  
 And all the more since he was wont to give,  
 Concerning the immortal gods themselves,  
 Many pronouncements with a tongue divine,  
 And to unfold by his pronouncements all  
 The nature of the world.

ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK AND NEW PROEM AGAINST A  
 TELEOLOGICAL CONCEPT—55-234

And walking now  
 In his own foot-prints, I do follow through  
 His reasonings, and with pronouncements teach  
 The covenant whereby all things are framed,  
 How under that covenant they must abide  
 Nor ever prevail to abrogate the aeons'  
 Inexorable decrees,—how (as we've found),  
 In class of mortal objects, o'er all else,  
 The mind exists of earth-born frame create  
 And impotent unscathèd to abide  
 Across the mighty aeons, and how come  
 In sleep those idol-apparitions,  
 That so befool intelligence when we  
 Do seem to view a man whom life has left.  
 Thus far we've gone ; the order of my plan  
 Hath brought me now unto the point where I  
 Must make report how, too, the universe  
 Consists of mortal body, born in time,  
 And in what modes that congregated stuff  
 Established itself as earth and sky,  
 Ocean, and stars, and sun, and ball of moon ;

And then what living creatures rose from out  
The old telluric places, and what ones  
Were never born at all ; and in what mode  
The human race began to name its things  
And use the varied speech from man to man ;  
And in what modes hath bosomed in their breasts  
That awe of gods, which halloweth in all lands  
Fanes, altars, groves, lakes, idols of the gods.  
Also I shall untangle by what power  
The steersman nature guides the sun's courses,  
And the meanderings of the moon, lest we,  
Perchance, should fancy that of own free will  
They circle their perennial courses round,  
Timing their motions for increase of crops  
And living creatures, or lest we should think  
They roll along by any plan of gods.  
For even *those* men who have learned full well  
That godheads lead a long life free of care,  
If yet meanwhile they wonder by what plan  
Things can go on (and chiefly yon high things  
Observed o'erhead on the ethereal coasts),  
Again are hurried back unto the fears  
Of old religion and adopt again  
Harsh masters, deemed almighty,—wretched men,  
Unwitting what can be and what cannot,  
And by what law to each its scope prescribed,  
Its boundary stone that clings so deep in Time.

But for the rest,—lest we delay thee here  
Longer by empty promises—behold,  
Before all else, the seas, the lands, the sky :  
O Memmius, their threefold nature, lo,  
Their bodies three, three aspects so unlike,  
Three frames so vast, a single day shall give  
Unto annihilation ! Then shall crash  
That massive form and fabric of the world

Sustained so many aeons ! Nor do I  
 Fail to perceive how strange and marvellous  
 This fact must strike the intellect of man,—  
 Annihilation of the sky and earth  
 That is to be,—and with what toil of words  
 'Tis mine to prove the same ; as happens oft  
 When once ye offer to man's listening ears  
Something before unheard of, but may not  
Subject it to the view of eyes for him  
Nor put it into hand—the sight and touch,  
 Whereby the opened highways of belief  
 Lead most directly into human breast  
 And regions of intelligence. But yet  
 I will speak out. The fact itself, perchance,  
 Will force belief in these my words, and thou  
 Mayst see, in little time, tremendously  
 With risen commotions of the lands all things  
 Quaking to pieces—which afar from us  
 May she, the steersman Nature, guide : and may  
 Reason, O rather than the fact itself,  
 Persuade us that all things can be o'erthrown  
 And sink with awful-sounding breakage down !

But ere on this I take a step to utter  
 Oracles holier and soundlier based  
 Than ever the Pythian pronounced for men  
 From out the tripod and the Delphian laurel,  
 I will unfold for thee with learned words  
Many a consolation, lest perchance,  
Still bridled by religion, thou suppose  
Lands, sun, and sky, sea, constellations, moon,  
Must dure forever, as of frame divine—  
 And so conclude that it is just that those,  
 (After the manner of the Giants), should all  
 Pay the huge penalties for monstrous crime,  
 Who by their reasonings do overshake

The ramparts of the universe and wish  
 There to put out the splendid sun of heaven,  
 Branding with mortal talk immortal things—  
 Though these same things are even so far removed  
 From any touch of deity and seem  
 So far unworthy of numbering with the gods,  
 That well they may be thought to furnish rather  
 A goodly instance of the sort of things  
 That lack the living motion, living sense.  
 For sure 'tis quite beside the mark to think  
 That judgment and the nature of the mind  
 In any kind of body can exist—  
 Just as in ether can't exist a tree,  
 Nor clouds in the salt sea, nor in the fields  
 Can fishes live, nor blood in timber be,  
 Nor sap in boulders : fixèd and arranged  
 Where everything may grow and have its place.  
 Thus nature of mind cannot arise alone  
 Without the body, nor have its being far  
 From thews and blood. Yet if 'twere possible ?—  
 Much rather might this very power of mind  
 Be in the head, the shoulders, or the heels,  
 And, born in any part soever, yet  
 In the same man, in the same vessel abide  
 But since within this body even of ours  
 Stands fixèd and appears arrangèd sure  
 Where soul and mind can each exist and grow,  
 Deny we must the more that they can dure  
 Outside the body and the breathing form  
 In rotting clods of earth, in the sun's fire,  
 In water, or in ether's skiey coasts.  
 Therefore these things no whit are furnishèd  
 With sense divine, since never can they be  
 With life-force quickened.

Likewise, thou canst ne'er

Believe the sacred seats of gods are here  
In any regions of this mundane world ;  
Indeed, the nature of the gods, so subtle,  
So far removed from these our senses, scarce  
Is seen even by intelligence of mind.  
And since they've ever eluded touch and thrust  
Of human hands, they cannot reach to grasp  
Aught tangible to us. For what may not  
Itself be touched in turn can never touch.  
Wherefore, besides, also their seats must be  
Unlike these seats of ours,—even subtle too,  
As meet for subtle essence—as I'll prove  
Hereafter unto thee with large discourse.  
Further, to say that for the sake of men  
They willed to prepare this world's magnificence,  
And that 'tis therefore duty and behoof  
To praise the work of gods as worthy praise,  
And that 'tis sacrilege for men to shake  
Ever by any force from out their seats  
What hath been stablished by the Forethought old  
To everlasting for races of mankind,  
And that 'tis sacrilege to assault by words  
And overtopple all from base to beam,—  
Memmius, such notions to concoct and pile,  
Is verily—to dote. Our gratefulness,  
O what emoluments could it confer  
Upon Immortals and upon the Blessed  
That they should take a step to manage aught  
For sake of us ? Or what new factor could,  
After so long a time, inveigle them—  
The hitherto reposeful—to desire  
To change their former life ? For rather he  
Whom old things chafe seems likely to rejoice  
At new ; but one that in fore-passèd time  
Hath chanced upon no ill, through goodly years,

O what could ever enkindle in such an one  
 Passion for strange experiment ? Or what  
 The evil for us, if we had ne'er been born ?—  
 As though, forsooth, in darkling realms and woe  
 Our life were lying till should dawn at last  
 The day-spring of creation ! Whosoever  
 Hath been begotten wills perforce to stay  
 In life, so long as fond delight detains ;  
 But whoso ne'er hath tasted love of life,  
And ne'er was in the count of living things,  
What hurts it him that he was never born ?  
 Whence, further, first was planted in the gods  
 The archetype for gendering the world  
 And the fore-notion of what man is like,  
 So that they knew and pre-conceived with mind  
 Just what they wished to make ? Or how were known  
 Ever the energies of primal germs,  
 And what those germs, by interchange of place,  
 Could thus produce, if nature's self had not  
 Given example for creating all ?  
 For in such wise primordials of things,  
 Many in many modes, astir by blows  
 From immemorial aeons, in motion too  
 By their own weights, have evermore been wont  
 To be so borne along and in all modes  
 To meet together and to try all sorts  
 Which, by combining one with other, they  
 Are powerful to create, that thus it is  
 No marvel now, if they have also fallen  
 Into arrangements such, and if they've passed  
 Into vibrations such, as those whereby  
 This sum of things is carried on to-day  
 By fixed renewal. But knew I never what  
The seeds primordial were, yet would I dare  
This to affirm, even from deep judgments based



Upon the ways and conduct of the skies—

This to maintain by many a fact besides—

That in no wise the nature of all things

For us was fashioned by a power divine—

So great the faults it stands encumbered with.

First, mark all regions which are overarched

By the prodigious reaches of the sky :

One yawning part thereof the mountain-chains

And forests of the beasts do have and hold ;

And cliffs, and desert fens, and wastes of sea

(Which sunder afar the beaches of the lands)

Possess it merely ; and, again, thereof

Well-nigh two-thirds intolerable heat

And a perpetual fall of frost doth rob

From mortal kind. And what is left to till,

Even *that* the force of nature would o'errun

With brambles, did not human force oppose,—

Long wont for livelihood to groan and sweat

Over the two-pronged mattock and to cleave

The soil in twain by pressing on the plough.

Unless, by the ploughshare turning the fruitful clods

And kneading the mould, we quicken into birth,

[The crops] spontaneously could not come up

Into the free bright air. Even then sometimes,

When things acquired by the sternest toil

Are now in leaf, are now in blossom all,

Either the skiey sun with baneful heats

Parches, or sudden rains or chilling rime

Destroys, or flaws of winds with furious whirl

Torment and twist. Beside these matters, why

Doth nature feed and foster on land and sea

The dreadful breed of savage beasts, the foes

Of the human clan ? Why do the seasons bring

Distempers with them ? Wherefore stalks at large

Death, so untimely ? Then, again, the babe,  
 Like to the castaway of the raging surf,  
 Lies naked on the ground, speechless, in want  
 Of every help for life, when nature first  
 Hath poured him forth upon the shores of light  
 With birth-pangs from within the mother's womb,  
 And with a plaintive wail he fills the place,—  
 As well befitting one for whom remains  
 In life a journey through so many ills.  
 But all the flocks and herds and all wild beasts  
 Come forth and grow, nor need the little rattles,  
 Nor must be treated to the humouring nurse's  
 Dear, broken chatter ; nor seek they divers clothes  
 To suit the changing skies ; nor need, in fine,  
 Nor arms, nor lofty ramparts, wherewithal  
 Their own to guard—because the earth herself  
 And nature, artificer of the world, bring forth  
 Aboundingly all things for all.

THE WORLD IS NOT ETERNAL—235-415

And first,  
 Since body of earth and water, air's light breath,  
 And fiery exhalations (of which four  
 This sum of things is seen to be compact)  
 So all have birth and perishable frame,  
 Thus the whole nature of the world itself  
 Must be conceived as perishable too.  
 For, verily, those things of which we see  
 The parts and members to have birth in time  
 And perishable shapes, those same we mark  
 To be invariably born in time  
 And born to die. And therefore when I see  
 The mightiest members and the parts of this  
 Our world consumed and begot again,

'Tis mine to know that also sky above  
 And earth beneath began of old in time  
 And shall in time go under to disaster.

And lest in these affairs thou deemest me  
 To have seized upon this point by sleight to serve  
 My own caprice—because I have assumed  
 That earth and fire are mortal things indeed,  
 And have not doubted water and the air  
 Both perish too and have affirmed the same  
 To be again begotten and wax big—  
 Mark well the argument : in first place, lo,  
 Some certain parts of earth, grievously parched  
 By unremitting suns, and trampled on  
 By a vast throng of feet, exhale abroad  
 A powdery haze and flying clouds of dust,  
 Which the stout winds disperse in the whole air.  
 A part, moreover, of her sod and soil  
 Is summoned to inundation by the rains ;  
 And rivers graze and gouge the banks away.  
 Besides, whatever takes a part its own  
 In fostering and increasing [aught] . . .

Is rendered back ; and since, beyond a doubt,  
 Earth, the all-mother, is beheld to be  
 Likewise the common sepulchre of things,  
 Therefore thou seest her minished of her plenty,  
 And then again augmented with new growth.

And for the rest, that sea, and streams, and springs  
 Forever with new waters overflow,  
 And that perennially the fluids well,  
 Needeth no words—the mighty flux itself  
 Of multitudinous waters round about  
 Declareth this. But whatso water first  
 Streams up is ever straightway carried off,  
 And thus it comes to pass that all in all

There is no overflow ; in part because  
 The burly winds (that over-sweep amain)  
 And skiey sun (that with his rays dissolves)  
 Do minish the level seas ; in part because  
 The water is diffusèd underground  
 Through all the lands. The brine is filtered off,  
 And then the liquid stuff seeps back again  
 And all regathers at the river-heads,  
 Whence in fresh-water currents on it flows  
 Over the lands, adown the channels which  
 Were cleft erstwhile and erstwhile bore along  
 The liquid-footed floods.

Now, then, of air  
 I'll speak, which hour by hour in all its body  
 Is changed innumerably. For whatsoe'er  
 Streams up in dust or vapour off of things,  
 The same is all and always borne along  
 Into the mighty ocean of the air ;  
 And did not air in turn restore to things  
 Bodies, and thus recruit them as they stream,  
 All things by this time had resolvèd been  
 And changèd into air. Therefore it never  
 Ceases to be engendered off of things  
 And to return to things, since verily  
 In constant flux do all things stream.

Likewise,  
 The abounding well-spring of the liquid light,  
 The ethereal sun, doth flood the heaven o'er  
 With constant flux of radiance ever new,  
 And with fresh light supplies the place of light,  
 Upon the instant. For whatever effulgence  
 Hath first streamed off, no matter where it falls,  
 Is lost unto the sun. And this 'tis thine  
 To know from these examples : soon as clouds  
 Have first begun to under-pass the sun,

And, as it were, to rend the rays of light  
 In twain, at once the lower part of them  
 Is lost entire, and earth is overcast  
 Where'er the thunderheads are rolled along—  
 So know thou mayst that things forever need  
 A fresh replenishment of gleam and glow,  
 And each effulgence, foremost flashèd forth,  
 Perisheth one by one. Nor otherwise  
 Can things be seen in sunlight, lest always  
 The fountain-head of light supply new light.  
 Indeed your earthly beacons of the night,  
 The hanging lampions and the torches, bright  
 With darting gleams and dense with livid soot,  
 Do hurry in like manner to supply  
 With ministering heat new light amain ;  
 Are all alive to quiver with their fires,—  
 Are so alive, that thus the light ne'er leaves  
 The spots it shines on, as if rent in twain :  
 So speedily is its destruction veiled  
 By the swift birth of flame from all the fires.  
 Thus, then, we must suppose that sun and moon  
 And stars dart forth their light from under-births  
 Ever and ever new, and whatso flames  
 First rise do perish always one by one—  
 Lest, haply, thou shouldst think they each endure  
 Inviolable.

Again, perceivest not  
How stones are also conquerèd by Time ?—  
 Not how the lofty towers ruin down,  
 And boulders crumble ?—Not how shrines of gods  
 And idols crack outworn ?—Nor how indeed  
 The holy Influence hath yet no power  
 There to postpone the Terminals of Fate,  
 Or headway make 'gainst Nature's fixed decrees ?  
 Again, behold we not the monuments

Of heroes, now in ruins, asking us,  
 In *their* turn likewise, if we don't believe  
 They also age with eld ? Behold we not  
 The rended basalt ruining amain  
 Down from the lofty mountains, powerless  
 To dure and dree the mighty forces there  
 Of finite time ?—for they would never fall  
 Rended asudden, if from infinite Past  
 They had prevailed against all engin'ries  
 Of the assaulting aeons, with no crash.

Again, now look at This, which round, above,  
 Contains the whole earth in its one embrace :  
 If from itself it procreates all things—  
 As some men tell—and takes them to itself  
 When once destroyed, entirely must it be  
 Of mortal birth and body ; for whate'er  
 From out itself giveth to other things  
 Increase and food, the same perforce must be  
 Minished, and then recruited when it takes  
 Things back into itself.

Besides all this,  
 If there had been no origin-in-birth  
 Of lands and sky, and they had ever been  
 The everlasting, why, ere Theban war  
 And obsequies of Troy, have other bards  
 Not also chanted other high affairs ?  
 Whither have sunk so oft so many deeds  
 Of heroes ? Why do *those* deeds live no more,  
 Ingrafted in eternal monuments  
 Of glory ? Verily, I guess, because  
 The Sum is new, and of a recent date  
 The nature of our universe, and had  
 Not long ago its own exordium.  
 Wherefore, even now some arts are being still  
 Refinèd, still increased : now unto ships

Is being added many a new device ;  
 And but the other day musician-folk  
 Gave birth to melic sounds of organing ;  
 And, then, this nature, this account of things  
 Hath been discovered latterly, and I  
 Myself have been discovered only now,  
 As first among the first, able to turn  
 The same into ancestral Roman speech.  
 Yet if, perchance, thou deemest that ere this  
 Existed all things even the same, but that  
 Perished the cycles of the human race  
 In fiery exhalations, or cities fell  
 By some tremendous quaking of the world,  
 Or rivers in fury, after constant rains,  
 Had plunged forth across the lands of earth  
 And whelmed the towns,—then, all the more must thou  
 Confess, defeated by the argument,  
 That there shall be annihilation too  
 Of lands and sky. For at a time when things  
 Were being taxed by maladies so great,  
 And so great perils, if some cause more fell  
 Had then assailed them, far and wide they would  
 Have gone to disaster and supreme collapse.  
 And by no other reasoning are we  
 Seen to be mortal, save that all of us  
 Sicken in turn with those same maladies  
 With which have sickened in the past those men  
 Whom nature hath removed from life.

Again,

Whatever abides eternal must indeed  
Either repel all strokes, because 'tis made  
Of solid body, and permit no entrance  
Of aught with power to sunder from within  
The parts compact—as are those seeds of stuff  
Whose nature we've exhibited before ;

Or else be able to endure through time  
 For this : because they are from blows exempt,  
 As is the void, the which abides untouched,  
 Unsmite by any stroke ; or else because  
 There is no room around, whereto things can,  
 As 'twere, depart in dissolution all,—  
 Even as the sum of sums eternal is,  
 Without or place beyond whereto things may  
 Asunder fly, or bodies which can smite,  
 And thus dissolve them by the blows of might.  
 But not of solid body, as I've shown,  
 Exists the nature of the world, because  
 In things is intermingled there a void ;  
 Nor is the world yet as the void, nor are,  
 Moreover, bodies lacking which, percase,  
 Rising from out the infinite, can fell  
 With fury-whirlwinds all this sum of things,<sup>1</sup>  
 Or bring upon them other cataclysm  
 Of peril strange ; and yonder, too, abides  
 The infinite space and the profound abyss—  
 Whereinto, lo, the ramparts of the world  
 Can yet be shivered. Or some other power  
 Can pound upon them till they perish all.  
 Thus is the door of doom, O nowise barred  
 Against the sky, against the sun and earth  
 And deep-sea waters, but wide open stands  
 And gloats upon them, monstrous and agape.  
 Wherefore, again, 'tis needful to confess  
 That these same things are born in time ; for things  
Which are of mortal body could indeed  
Never from infinite past until to-day  
Have spurned the multitudinous assaults  
Of the immeasurable aeons old.

Again, since battle so fiercely one with other

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* not "the sum of sums," but the created world we perceive.



The four most mighty members <sup>1</sup> of the world,  
Arousdè in an all unholy war,  
Seest not that there may be for them an end  
Of the long strife ?—Or when the skiey sun  
And all the heat have won dominion o'er  
The sucked-up waters all ?—And this they try  
Still to accomplish, though as yet they fail,—  
For so aboundingly the streams supply  
New store of waters that 'tis rather they  
Who menace the world with inundations vast  
From forth the unplumbed chasms of the sea.  
But vain,—since winds (that over-sweep amain)  
And skiey sun (that with his rays dissolves)  
Do minish the level seas and trust their power  
To dry up all, before the waters can  
Arrive the end of their endeavouring.  
Breathing such vasty warfare, they contend  
In balanced strife the one with other still  
Concerning mighty issues,—though indeed  
The fire was once the more victorious,  
And once—as goes the tale—the water won  
A kingdom in the fields. For fire o'ermastered  
And licked up many things and burnt away,  
What time the impetuous horses of the Sun  
Snatched Phaeton headlong from his skiey road  
Down the whole ether and over all the lands.  
But the omnipotent Father in keen wrath  
Then with the sudden smite of thunderbolt  
Did hurl the mighty-minded hero off  
Those horses to the earth. And Sol, his sire,  
Meeting him as he fell, caught up in hand  
The ever-blazing lampion of the world,  
And drave together the pell-mell horses there  
And yoked them all a-tremble, and amain,

<sup>1</sup> The four : fire, earth, air, and water.

Steering them over along their own old road,  
 Restored the cosmos,—as forsooth we hear  
 From songs of ancient poets of the Greeks—  
 A tale too far away from truth, meseems.  
 For fire can win when from the infinite  
 Has risen a larger throng of particles  
 Of fiery stuff ; and then its powers succumb,  
 Somehow subdued again, or else at last  
 It shrivels in torrid atmospheres the world.  
 And whilom water too began to win—  
 As goes the story—when it overwhelmed  
 The lives of men with billows ; and thereafter,  
 When all that force of water-stuff which forth  
 From out the infinite had risen up  
 Did now retire, as somehow turned aside,  
 The rain-storms stopped, and streams their fury  
 checked.

FORMATION OF THE WORLD AND ASTRONOMICAL  
 QUESTIONS—416-768

But in what modes that conflux of first-stuff  
 Did found the multitudinous universe  
 Of earth, and sky, and the unfathomed deeps  
 Of ocean, and courses of the sun and moon,  
 I'll now in order tell. For of a truth  
 Neither by counsel did the primal germs  
 'Stablish themselves, as by keen act of mind,  
 Each in its proper place ; nor did they make,  
 Forsooth, a compact how each germ should move ;  
 But, lo, because primordials of things,  
 Many in many modes, astir by blows  
 From immemorial aeons, in motion too  
 By their own weights, have evermore been wont  
 To be so borne along and in all modes

To meet together and to try all sorts  
 Which, by combining one with other, they  
 Are powerful to create : because of *this*  
 It comes to pass that those primordials,  
 Diffusèd far and wide through mighty aeons,  
 The while they unions try, and motions too,  
 Of every kind, meet at the last amain,  
 And so become oft the commencements fit  
 Of mighty things—earth, sea, and sky, and race  
 Of living creatures. *— Godly no*

In that long-ago

The wheel of the sun could nowhere be discerned  
 Flying far up with its abounding blaze,  
 Nor constellations of the mighty world,  
 Nor ocean, nor heaven, nor even earth nor air.  
 Nor aught of things like unto things of ours  
 Could then be seen—but only some strange storm  
 And a prodigious hurly-burly mass  
 Compounded of all kinds of primal germs,  
 Whose battling discords in disorder kept  
 Interstices, and paths, coherencies,  
 And weights, and blows, encounterings, and motions,  
 Because, by reason of their forms unlike  
 And varied shapes, they could not all thuswise  
 Remain conjoinèd nor harmoniously  
 Have interplay of movements. But from there  
 Portions began to fly asunder, and like  
 With like to join, and to block out a world,  
 And to divide its members and dispose  
 Its mightier parts—that is, to set secure  
 The lofty heavens from the lands, and cause  
 The sea to spread with waters separate,  
 And fires of ether separate and pure  
 Likewise to congregate apart.

For, lo,

First came together the earthy particles  
 (As being heavy and intertangled) there  
 In the mid-region, and all began to take  
 The lowest abodes ; and ever the more they got  
 One with another intertangled, the more  
 They pressed from out their mass those particles  
 Which were to form the sea, the stars, the sun,  
 And moon, and ramparts of the mighty world—  
 For these consist of seeds more smooth and round  
 And of much smaller elements than earth.  
 And thus it was that ether, fraught with fire,  
 First broke away from out the earthen parts,  
 Athrough the innumerable pores of earth,  
 And raised itself aloft, and with itself  
 Bore lightly off the many starry fires ;  
 And not far otherwise we often see

And the still lakes and the perennial streams  
 Exhale a mist, and even as earth herself  
 Is seen at times to smoke, when first at dawn  
 The light of the sun, the many-rayed, begins  
 To redden into gold, over the grass  
 Begemmed with dew. When all of these are brought  
 Together overhead, the clouds on high  
 With now concreted body weave a cover  
 Beneath the heavens. And thuswise ether too,  
 Light and diffusive, with concreted body  
 On all sides spread, on all sides bent itself  
 Into a dome, and, far and wide diffused  
 On unto every region on all sides,  
 Thus hedged all else within its greedy clasp.  
 Hard upon ether came the origins  
 Of sun and moon, whose globes revolve in air  
 Midway between the earth and mightiest ether,—  
 For neither took them, since they weighed too little

To sink and settle, but too much to glide  
Along the upmost shores ; and yet they are  
In such a wise midway between the twain  
As ever to whirl their living bodies round,  
And ever to dure as parts of the wide Whole ;  
In the same fashion as certain members may  
In us remain at rest, whilst others move.  
When, then, these substances had been withdrawn,  
Amain the earth, where now extend the vast  
Cerulean zones of all the level seas,  
Caved in, and down along the hollows poured  
The whirlpools of her brine ; and day by day  
The more the tides of ether and rays of sun  
On every side constrained into one mass  
The earth by lashing it again, again,  
Upon its outer edges (so that then,  
Being thus beat upon, 'twas all condensed  
About its proper centre), ever the more  
The salty sweat, from out its body squeezed,  
Augmented ocean and the fields of foam  
By seeping through its frame, and all the more  
Those many particles of heat and air  
Escaping, began to fly aloft, and form,  
By condensation there afar from earth,  
The high refulgent circuits of the heavens.  
The plains began to sink, and windy slopes  
Of the high mountains to increase ; for rocks  
Could not subside, nor all the parts of ground  
Settle alike to one same level there.

Thus, then, the massy weight of earth stood firm  
With now concreted body, when (as 'twere)  
All of the slime of the world, heavy and gross,  
Had run together and settled at the bottom,  
Like lees or bilge. Then ocean, then the air,  
Then ether herself, the fraught-with-fire, were all

Left with their liquid bodies pure and free,  
And each more lighter than the next below ;  
 And ether, most light and liquid of the three,  
 Floats on above the long aerial winds,  
 Nor with the brawling of the winds of air  
 Mingles its liquid body. It doth leave  
 All there—those under-realms below her heights—  
 There to be overset in whirlwinds wild,—  
 Doth leave all there to brawl in wayward gusts,  
 Whilst, gliding with a fixèd impulse still,  
 Itself it bears its fires along. For, lo,  
 That ether can flow thus steadily on, on,  
 With one unaltered urge, the Pontus proves—  
 That sea which floweth forth with fixèd tides,  
 Keeping one onward tenor as it glides.

And that the earth may there abide at rest  
 In the mid-region of the world, it needs  
 Must vanish bit by bit in weight and lessen,  
 And have another substance underneath,  
 Conjoinèd to it from its earliest age  
 In linkèd unison with the vasty world's  
 Realms of the air in which it roots and lives.  
 On this account, the earth is not a load,  
 Nor presses down on winds of air beneath ;  
 Even as unto a man his members be  
 Without all weight—the head is not a load  
 Unto the neck ; nor do we feel the whole  
 Weight of the body to centre in the feet.  
 But whatso weights come on us from without,  
 Weights laid upon us, these harass and chafe,  
 Though oft far lighter. For to such degree  
 It matters always what the innate powers  
 Of any given thing may be. The earth  
 Was, then, no alien substance fetched amain,  
 And from no alien firmament cast down

On alien air ; but was conceived, like air,  
In the first origin of this the world,  
As a fixed portion of the same, as now  
Our members are seen to be a part of us.

Besides, the earth, when of a sudden shook  
By the big thunder, doth with her motion shake  
All that's above her—which she ne'er could do  
By any means, were earth not bounden fast  
Unto the great world's realms of air and sky :  
For they cohere together with common roots,  
Conjoinèd both, even from their earliest age,  
In linkèd unison. Aye, seest thou not  
That this most subtle energy of soul  
Supports our body, though so heavy a weight,—  
Because, indeed, 'tis with it so conjoined  
In linkèd unison ? What power, in sum,  
Can raise with agile leap our body aloft,  
Save energy of mind which steers the limbs ?  
Now seest thou not how powerful may be  
A subtle nature, when conjoined it is  
With heavy body, as air is with the earth  
Conjoined, and energy of mind with us ?

Now let us sing what makes the stars to move.  
In first place, if the mighty sphere of heaven  
Revolveth round, then needs we must aver  
That on the upper and the under pole  
Presses a certain air, and from without  
Confines them and encloseth at each end ;  
And that, moreover, another air above  
Streams on athwart the top of the sphere and tends  
In same direction as are rolled along  
The glittering stars of the eternal world ;  
Or that another still streams on below  
To whirl the sphere from under up and on  
In opposite direction—as we see

The rivers turn the wheels and water-scoops.  
 It may be also that the heavens do all  
 Remain at rest, whilst yet are borne along  
 The lucid constellations ; either because  
 Swift tides of ether are by sky enclosed,  
 And whirl around, seeking a passage out,  
 And everywhere make roll the starry fires  
 Through the Summanian regions of the sky ;  
 Or else because some air, streaming along  
 From an eternal quarter off beyond,  
 Whirleth the driven fires ; or, then, because  
 The fires themselves have power to creep along,  
 Going wherever their food invites and calls,  
 And feeding their flaming bodies everywhere  
 Throughout the sky. Yet which of these is cause  
 In this *our* world 'tis hard to say for sure ;  
 But what can be throughout the universe,  
 In divers worlds on divers plan create,  
 This only do I show, and follow on  
 To assign unto the motions of the stars  
 Even several causes which 'tis possible  
 Exist throughout the universal All ;  
 Of which yet one must be the cause even here  
 Which maketh motion for our constellations.  
 Yet to decide which one of them it be  
 Is not the least the business of a man  
 Advancing step by cautious step, as I.

Nor can the sun's wheel larger be by much  
 Nor its own blaze much less than either seems  
 Unto our senses. For from whatso spaces  
 Fires have the power on us to cast their beams  
 And blow their scorching exhalations forth  
 Against our members, those same distances  
 Take nothing by those intervals away  
 From bulk of flames ; and to the sight the fire



Is nothing shrunken. Therefore, since the heat  
And the outpoured light of skiey sun  
Arrive our senses and caress our limbs,  
Form too and bigness of the sun must look  
Even here from earth just as they really be,  
So that thou canst scarce nothing take or add.  
And whether the journeying moon illuminate  
The regions round with bastard beams, or throw  
From off her proper body her own light,—  
Whichever it be, she journeys with a form  
Naught larger than the form doth seem to be  
Which we with eyes of ours perceive. For all  
The far removed objects of our gaze  
Seem through much air confused in their look  
Ere minished in their bigness. Wherefore, moon,  
Since she presents bright look and clear-cut form,  
May there on high by us on earth be seen  
Just as she is with éxtreme bounds defined,  
And just of the size. And lastly, whatso fires  
Of ether thou from earth beholdest, these  
Thou mayst consider as possibly of size  
The least bit less, or larger by a hair  
Than they appear—since whatso fires we view  
Here in the lands of earth are seen to change  
From time to time their size to less or more  
Only the least, when more or less away,  
So long as still they bicker clear, and still  
Their glow's perceived.

Nor need there be for men  
Astonishment that yonder sun so small  
Can yet send forth so great a light as fills  
Oceans and all the lands and sky aflood,  
And with its fiery exhalations steeps  
The world at large. For it may be, indeed,  
That one vast-flowing well-spring of the whole

Wide world from here hath opened and out-gushed,  
 And shot its light abroad ; because thuswise  
 The elements of fiery exhalations  
 From all the world around together come,  
 And thuswise flow into a bulk so big  
 That from one single fountain-head may stream  
 This heat and light. And seest thou not, indeed,  
 How widely one small water-spring may wet  
 The meadow-lands at times and flood the fields ?  
 'Tis even possible, besides, that heat  
 From forth the sun's own fire, albeit that fire  
 Be not a great, may permeate the air  
 With the fierce hot—if but, perchance, the air  
 Be of condition and so tempered then  
 As to be kindled, even when beat upon  
 Only by little particles of heat—  
 Just as we sometimes see the standing grain  
 Or stubble straw in conflagration all  
 From one lone spark. And possibly the sun,  
 Agleam on high with rosy lampiòn,  
 Possesses about him with invisible heats  
 A plenteous fire, by no effulgence marked,  
 So that he maketh, he, the Fraught-with-fire,  
 Increase to such degree the force of rays.

Nor is there one sure cause revealed to men  
 How the sun journeys from his summer haunts  
 On to the mid-most winter turning-points  
 In Capricorn, and thence reverting veers  
 Back to solstitial goals of Cancer ; nor  
 How 'tis the moon is seen each month to cross  
 That very distance which in traversing  
 The sun consumes the measure of a year.  
 I say, no one clear reason hath been given  
 For these affairs. Yet chief in likelihood  
 Seemeth the doctrine which the holy thought

Of great Democritus lays down : that ever  
The nearer the constellations be to earth  
The less can they by whirling of the sky  
Be borne along, because those skiey powers  
Of speed aloft do vanish and decrease  
In under-regions, and the sun is thus  
Left by degrees behind amongst those signs  
That follow after, since the sun he lies  
Far down below the starry signs that blaze ;  
And the moon lags even tardier than the sun :  
In just so far as is her course removed  
From upper heaven and nigh unto the lands,  
In just so far she fails to keep the pace  
With starry signs above ; for just so far  
As feebler is the whirl that bears her on,  
(Being, indeed, still lower than the sun),  
In just so far do all the starry signs,  
Circling around, o'ertake her and o'erpass.  
Therefore it happens that the moon appears  
More swiftly to return to any sign  
Along the Zodiac, than doth the sun,  
Because those signs do visit her again  
More swiftly than they visit the great sun.  
It can be also that two streams of air  
Alternately at fixèd periods  
Blow out from transverse regions of the world,  
Of which the one may thrust the sun away  
From summer-signs to mid-most winter goals  
And rigours of the cold, and the other then  
May cast him back from icy shades of chill  
Even to the heat-fraught regions and the signs  
That blaze along the Zodiac. So, too,  
We must suppose the moon and all the stars,  
Which through the mighty and sidereal years  
Roll round in mighty orbits, may be sped

By streams of air from regions alternate.  
 Seest thou not also how the clouds be sped  
 By contrary winds to regions contrary,  
 The lower clouds diversely from the upper ?  
 Then, why may yonder stars in ether there  
 Along their mighty orbits not be borne  
 By currents opposite the one to other ?

But night o'erwhelms the lands with vasty murk  
 Either when sun, after his diurnal course,  
 Hath walked the ultimate regions of the sky  
 And wearily hath panted forth his fires,  
 Shivered by their long journeying and wasted  
 By traversing the multitudinous air,  
 Or else because the self-same force that drave  
 His orb along above the lands compels  
 Him then to turn his course beneath the lands.  
 Matuta also at a fixèd hour  
 Spreadeth the roseate morning out along  
 The coasts of heaven and deploys the light,  
 Either because the self-same sun, returning  
 Under the lands, aspires to seize the sky,  
 Striving to set it blazing with his rays  
 Ere he himself appear, or else because  
 Fires then will congregate and many seeds  
 Of heat are wont, even at a fixèd time,  
 To stream together,—gendering evermore  
 New suns and light. Just so the story goes  
 That from the Idaean mountain-tops are seen  
 Dispersèd fires upon the break of day  
 Which thence combine, as 'twere, into one ball  
 And form an orb. Nor yet in these affairs  
 Is aught for wonder that these seeds of fire  
 Can thus together stream at time so fixed  
 And shape anew the splendour of the sun.  
 For many facts we see which come to pass

At fixèd time in all things : burgeon shrubs  
At fixèd time, and at a fixèd time  
They cast their flowers ; and Eld commands the teeth,  
At time as surely fixed, to drop away,  
And Youth commands the growing boy to bloom  
With the soft down and let from both his cheeks  
The soft beard fall. And lastly, thunder-bolts,  
Snow, rains, clouds, winds, at seasons of the year  
Nowise unfixèd, all do come to pass.  
For where, even from their old primordial start  
Causes have ever worked in such a way,  
And where, even from the world's first origin,  
Thuswise have things befallen, so even now  
After a fixèd order they come round  
In sequence also.

Likewise, days may wax  
Whilst the nights wane, and daylight minished be  
Whilst nights do take their augmentations,  
Either because the self-same sun, coursing  
Under the lands and over in two arcs,  
A longer and a briefer, doth dispart  
The coasts of ether and divides in twain  
His orbit all unequally, and adds,  
As round he's borne, unto the one half there  
As much as from the other half he's ta'en,  
Until he then arrives that sign of heaven  
Where the year's node renders the shades of night  
Equal unto the periods of light.  
For when the sun is midway on his course  
Between the blasts of northwind and of south,  
Heaven keeps his two goals parted equally,  
By virtue of the fixed position old  
Of the whole starry Zodiac, through which  
That sun, in winding onward, takes a year,  
Illumining the sky and all the lands

With oblique light—as men declare to us  
 Who by their diagrams have charted well  
 Those regions of the sky which be adorned  
 With the arrangèd signs of Zodiac.  
 Or else, because in certain parts the air  
 Under the lands is denser, the tremulous  
 Bright beams of fire do waver tardily,  
 Nor easily can penetrate that air  
 Nor yet emerge unto their rising-place :  
 For this it is that nights in winter time  
 Do linger long, ere comes the many-rayed  
 Round Badge of the day. Or else because, as said,  
 In alternating seasons of the year  
 Fires, now more quick, and now more slow, are wont  
 To stream together,—the fires which make the sun  
 To rise in some one spot—therefore it is  
 That those men seem to speak the truth [who hold  
 A new sun is with each new daybreak born].

The moon she possibly doth shine because  
 Strook by the rays of sun, and day by day  
 May turn unto our gaze her light, the more  
 She doth recede from orb of sun, until,  
 Facing him opposite across the world,  
 She hath with full effulgence gleamed abroad,  
 And, at her rising as she soars above,  
 Hath there observed his setting ; thence likewise  
 She needs must hide, as 'twere, her light behind <sup>1</sup>  
 By slow degrees, the nearer now she glides,  
 Along the circle of the Zodiac,  
 From her far place toward fires of yonder sun,—  
 As those men hold who feign the moon to be  
 Just like a ball and to pursue a course  
 Betwixt the sun and earth. There is, again,  
 Some reason to suppose that moon may roll

<sup>1</sup> In her other side not turned toward us.

With light her very own, and thus display  
The varied shapes of her resplendence there.  
For near her is, perchance, another body,  
Invisible, because devoid of light,  
Borne on and gliding all along with her,  
Which in three modes may block and blot her disk.  
Again, she may revolve upon herself,  
Like to a ball's sphere—if perchance that be—  
One half of her dyed o'er with glowing light,  
And by the revolution of that sphere  
She may beget for us her varying shapes,  
Until she turns that fiery part of her  
Full to the sight and open eyes of men ;  
Thence by slow stages round and back she whirls,  
Withdrawing thus the luminiferous part  
Of her sphered mass and ball, as, verily,  
The Babylonian doctrine of Chaldees,  
Refuting the art of Greek astrologers,  
Labours, in opposition, to prove sure—  
As if, forsooth, the thing for which each fights,  
Might not alike be true,—or aught there were  
Wherefore thou mightest risk embracing one  
More than the other notion. Then, again,  
Why a new moon might not forevermore  
Created be with fixed successions there  
Of shapes and with configurations fixed,  
And why each day that bright created moon  
Might not miscarry and another be,  
In its stead and place, engenderèd anew,  
'Tis hard to show by reason, or by words  
To prove absurd—since, lo, so many things  
Can be create with fixed successions :  
Spring-time and Venus come, and Venus' boy,  
The wingèd harbinger, steps on before,  
And hard on Zephyr's foot-prints Mother Flora,

Sprinkling the ways before them, filleth all  
 With colours and with odours excellent ;  
 Whereafter follows arid Heat, and he  
 Companioned is by Ceres, dusty one,  
 And by the Etesian Breezes of the north  
 At rising of the dog-star of the year ;  
 Then cometh Autumn on, and with him steps  
 Lord Bacchus, and then other Seasons too  
 And other Winds do follow—the high roar  
 Of great Volturnus, and the Southwind strong  
 With thunder-bolts. At last earth's Shortest-Day  
 Bears on to men the snows and brings again  
 The numbing cold. And Winter follows her,  
 His teeth with chills a-chatter. Therefore, 'tis  
 The less a marvel, if at fixèd time  
 A moon is thus begotten and again  
 At fixèd time destroyed, since things so many  
 Can come to being thus at fixèd time.

Likewise, the sun's eclipses and the moon's  
 Far occultations rightly thou mayst deem  
 As due to several causes. For, indeed,  
 Why should the moon be able to shut out  
 Earth from the light of sun, and on the side  
 To earthward thrust her high head under sun,  
 Opposing dark orb to his glowing beams—  
 And yet, at same time, one suppose the effect  
 Could not result from some one other body  
 Which glides devoid of light forevermore ?  
 Again, why could not sun, in weakened state,  
 At fixèd time for-lose his fires, and then,  
 When he has passèd on along the air  
 Beyond the regions, hostile to his flames,  
 That quench and kill his fires, why could not he  
 Renew his light ? And why should earth in turn  
 Have power to rob the moon of light, and there,



Herself on high, keep the sun hid beneath,  
 Whilst the moon glideth in her monthly course  
 Athrough the rigid shadows of the cone ?—  
 And yet, at same time, some one other body  
 Not have the power to under-pass the moon,  
 Or glide along above the orb of sun,  
 Breaking his rays and outspread light asunder ?  
 And still, if moon herself refulgent be  
 With her own sheen, why could she not at times  
 In some one quarter of the mighty world  
 Grow weak and weary, whilst she passeth through  
 Regions unfriendly to the beams her own ?

#### ORIGINS OF VEGETABLE AND ANIMAL LIFE—769-921

And now to what remains !—Since I've resolved  
 By what arrangements all things come to pass  
 Through the blue regions of the mighty world,—  
 How we can know what energy and cause  
 Started the various courses of the sun  
 And the moon's goings, and by what far means  
 They can succumb, the while with thwarted light,  
 And veil with shade the unsuspecting lands,  
 When, as it were, they blink, and then again  
 With open eye survey all regions wide,  
 Resplendent with white radiance—I do now  
 Return unto the world's primeval age  
 And tell what first the soft young fields of earth  
 With earliest parturition had decreed  
 To raise in air unto the shores of light  
 And to entrust unto the wayward winds.

In the beginning, earth gave forth, around  
 The hills and over all the length of plains,  
 The race of grasses and the shining green ;

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The flowery meadows sparkled all aglow  
With greening colour, and thereafter, lo,  
Unto the divers kinds of trees was given  
An emulous impulse mightily to shoot,  
With a free rein, aloft into the air.

As feathers and hairs and bristles are begot  
The first on members of the four-foot breeds  
And on the bodies of the strong-y-winged,  
Thus then the new Earth first of all put forth  
Grasses and shrubs, and afterward begat  
The mortal generations, there upsprung—  
Innumerable in modes innumerable—  
After diverging fashions. For from sky  
These breathing-creatures never can have dropped,  
Nor the land-dwellers ever have come up  
Out of sea-pools of salt. How true remains,  
How merited is that adopted name  
Of earth—“ The Mother ! ”—since from out the earth  
Are all begotten. And even now arise  
From out the loams how many living things—  
Concreted by the rains and heat of the sun.  
Wherefore 'tis less a marvel, if they sprang  
In Long Ago more many, and more big,  
Matured of those days in the fresh young years  
Of earth and ether. First of all, the race  
Of the wingèd ones and parti-coloured birds,  
Hatched out in spring-time, left their eggs behind ;  
As now-a-days in summer tree-cricketts  
Do leave their shiny husks of own accord,  
Seeking their food and living. Then it was  
This earth of thine first gave unto the day  
The mortal generations ; for prevailed  
Among the fields abounding hot and wet.  
And hence, where any fitting spot was given,  
There 'gan to grow womb-cavities, by roots

Affixed to earth. And when in ripened time  
The age of the young within (that sought the air  
And fled earth's damps) had burst these wombs, O then  
Would Nature thither turn the pores of earth  
And make her spurt from open veins a juice  
Like unto milk ; even as a woman now  
Is filled, at child-bearing, with the sweet milk,  
Because all that swift stream of aliment  
Is thither turned unto the mother-breasts.  
There earth would furnish to the children food ;  
Warmth was their swaddling cloth, the grass their bed  
Abounding in soft down. Earth's newness then  
Would rouse no dour spells of the bitter cold,  
Nor éxtreme heats nor winds of mighty powers—  
For all things grow and gather strength through time  
In like proportions ; and then earth was young.

Wherefore, again, again, how merited  
Is that adopted name of Earth—the Mother !—  
Since she herself begat the human race,  
And at one well-nigh fixèd time brought forth  
Each beast that ranges raving round about  
Upon the mighty mountains and all birds  
Aerial with many a varied shape.  
But, lo, because her bearing years must end,  
She ceased, like to a woman worn by eld.  
For lapsing aeons change the nature of  
The whole wide world, and all things needs must take  
One status after other, nor aught persists  
Forever like itself. All things depart ;  
Nature she changeth all, compelleth all  
To transformation. Lo, *this* moulders down,  
A-slack with weary eld, and *that*, again,  
Prosperes in glory, issuing from contempt.  
In suchwise, then, the lapsing aeons change  
The nature of the whole wide world, and earth

Taketh one status after other. And what  
 She bore of old, she now can bear no longer,  
 And what she never bore, she can to-day.

In those days also the telluric world  
 Strove to beget the monsters that upsprung  
 With their astounding visages and limbs—  
 The Man-woman—a thing betwixt the twain,  
 Yet neither, and from either sex remote—  
 Some gruesome Boggles orphaned of the feet,  
 Some widowed of the hands, dumb Horrors too  
 Without a mouth, or blind Ones of no eye,  
 Or Bulks all shackled by their legs and arms  
 Cleaving unto the body fore and aft,  
 Thuswise, that never could they do or go,  
 Nor shun disaster, nor take the good they would.  
 And other prodigies and monsters earth  
 Was then begetting of this sort—in vain,  
 Since Nature banned with horror their increase,  
 And powerless were they to reach unto  
 The coveted flower of fair maturity,  
 Or to find aliment, or to intertwine  
 In works of Venus. For we see there must  
 Concur in life conditions manifold,  
 If life is ever by begetting life  
 To forge the generations one by one :  
 First, foods must be ; and, next, a path whereby  
 The seeds of impregnation in the frame  
 May ooze, released from the members all ;  
 Last, the possession of those instruments  
 Whereby the male with female can unite,  
 The one with other in mutual ravishments.

And in the ages after monsters died,  
 Perforce there perished many a stock, unable  
 By propagation to forge a progeny.  
 For whatsoever creatures thou beholdest

Breathing the breath of life, the same have been  
Even from their earliest age preserved alive  
By cunning, or by valour, or at least  
By speed of foot or wing. And many a stock  
Remaineth yet, because of use to man,  
And so committed to man's guardianship.  
Valour hath saved alive fierce lion-breeds  
And many another terrorizing race,  
Cunning the foxes, flight the antlered stags.  
Light-sleeping dogs with faithful heart in breast,<sup>1</sup>  
However, and every kind begot from seed  
Of beasts of draft, as, too, the woolly flocks  
And hornèd cattle, all, my Memmius,  
Have been committed to guardianship of men.  
For anxiously they fled the savage beasts,  
And peace they sought and their abundant foods,  
Obtained with never labours of their own,  
Which we secure to them as fit rewards  
For their good service. But those beasts to whom  
Nature has granted naught of these same things—  
Beasts quite unfit by own free will to thrive  
And vain for any service unto us  
In thanks for which we should permit their kind  
To feed and be in our protection safe—  
Those, of a truth, were wont to be exposed,  
Enshackled in the gruesome bonds of doom,  
As prey and booty for the rest, until  
Nature reduced that stock to utter death.

But Centaurs ne'er have been, nor can there be  
Creatures of twofold stock and double frame,  
Compact of members alien in kind,  
Yet formed with equal function, equal force  
In every bodily part—a fact thou mayst,  
However dull thy wits, well learn from this :

<sup>1</sup> Borrowed from Munro's prose.

The horse, when his three years have rolled away,  
 Flowers in his prime of vigour ; but the boy  
 Not so, for oft even then he gropes in sleep  
 After the milky nipples of the breasts,  
 An infant still. And later, when at last  
 The lusty powers of horses and stout limbs,  
 Now weak through lapsing life, do fail with age,  
 Lo, only then doth youth with flowering years  
 Begin for boys, and clothe their ruddy cheeks  
 With the soft down. So never deem, percase,  
 That from a man and from the seed of horse,  
 The beast of draft, can Centaurs be composed  
 Or e'er exist alive, nor Scyllas be—  
 The half-fish bodies girdled with mad dogs—  
 Nor others of this sort, in whom we mark  
 Members discordant each with each ; for ne'er  
 At one same time they reach their flower of age  
 Or gain and lose full vigour of their frame,  
 And never burn with one same lust of love,  
 And never in their habits they agree,  
 Nor find the same foods equally delightsome—  
 Sooth, as one oft may see the bearded goats  
 Batten upon the hemlock which to man  
 Is violent poison.—Once again, since flame  
 Is wont to scorch and burn the tawny bulks  
 Of the great lions as much as other kinds  
 Of flesh and blood existing in the lands,  
 How could it be that she, Chimaera lone,  
 With triple body—fore, a lion she ;  
 And aft, a dragon ; and betwixt, a goat—  
 Might at the mouth from out the body belch  
 Infuriate flame ? Wherefore, the man who feigns  
 Such beings could have been engenderèd  
 When earth was new and the young sky was fresh  
 (Basing his empty argument on *new*)

May babble with like reason many whims  
Into our ears : he'll say, perhaps, that then  
Rivers of gold through every landscape flowed,  
That trees were wont with precious stones to flower,  
Or that in those far aeons man was born  
With such gigantic length and lift of limbs  
As to be able, based upon his feet,  
Deep oceans to bestride ; or with his hands  
To whirl the firmament around his head.  
For though in earth were many seeds of things  
In the old time when this telluric world  
First poured the breeds of animals abroad,  
Still that is nothing of a sign that then  
Such hybrid creatures could have been begot  
And limbs of all beasts heterogeneous  
Have been together knit ; because, indeed,  
The divers kinds of grasses and the grains  
And the delightsome trees—which even now  
Spring up abounding from within the earth—  
Can still ne'er be begotten with their stems  
Begrafted into one ; but each sole thing  
Proceeds according to its proper wont  
And all conserve their own distinctions based  
In nature's fixed decree.

ORIGINS AND SAVAGE PERIOD OF MANKIND—  
922-1008

But mortal man  
Was then far hardier in the old champaign,  
As well he should be, since a hardier earth  
Had him begotten ; builded too was he  
Of bigger and more solid bones within,  
And knit with stalwart sinews through the flesh,  
Nor easily seized by either heat or cold,

Or alien food or any ail or irk.

And whilst so many lustrums of the sun

Rolled on across the sky, men led a life

After the roving habit of wild beasts.

Not then were sturdy guiders of curved ploughs,

And none knew then to work the fields with iron,

Or plant young shoots in holes of delvèd loam,

Or lop with hookèd knives from off high trees

The boughs of yester-year. What sun and rains

To them had given, what earth of own accord

Created then, was boon enough to glad

Their simple hearts. Mid acorn-laden oaks

Would they refresh their bodies for the nonce ;

And the wild berries of the arbutè-tree,

Which now thou seest to ripen purple-red

In winter time, the old telluric soil

Would bear then more abundant and more big.

And many coarse foods, too, in long ago

The blooming freshness of the rank young world

Produced, enough for those poor wretches there.

And rivers and springs would summon them of old

To slake the thirst, as now from the great hills

The water's down-rush calls aloud and far

The thirsty generations of the wild.

So, too, they sought the grottos of the Nymphs—

The woodland haunts discovered as they ranged—

From forth of which they knew that gliding rills

With gush and splash abounding laved the rocks,

The dripping rocks, and trickled from above

Over the verdant moss ; and here and there

Welled up and burst across the open flats.

As yet they knew not to enkindle fire

Against the cold, nor hairy pelts to use

And clothe their bodies with the spoils of beasts ;

But huddled in groves, and mountain-caves, and woods,



And 'mongst the thickets hid their squalid backs,  
When driven to flee the lashings of the winds  
And the big rains. Nor could they then regard  
The general good, nor did they know to use  
In common any customs, any laws :  
Whatever of booty fortune unto each  
Had proffered, each alone would bear away,  
By instinct trained for self to thrive and live.  
And Venus in the forests then would link  
The lovers' bodies ; for the woman yielded  
Either from mutual flame, or from the man's  
Impetuous fury and insatiate lust,  
Or from a bribe—as acorn-nuts, choice pears,  
Or the wild berries of the arbute-tree.  
And trusting wondrous strength of hands and legs,  
They'd chase the forest-wanderers, the beasts ;  
And many they'd conquer, but some few they fled,  
A-skulk into their hiding-places . . .

With the flung stones and with the ponderous heft  
Of gnarlèd branch. And by the time of night  
O'ertaken, they would throw, like bristly boars,  
Their wildman's limbs naked upon the earth,  
Rolling themselves in leaves and fronded boughs.  
Nor would they call with lamentations loud  
Around the fields for daylight and the sun,  
Quaking and wand'ring in shadows of the night ;  
But, silent and buried in a sleep, they'd wait  
Until the sun with rosy flambeau brought  
The glory to the sky. From childhood wont  
Ever to see the dark and day begot  
In times alternate, never might they be  
Wildered by wild misgiving, lest a night  
Eternal should possess the lands, with light  
Of sun withdrawn forever. But their care

Was rather that the clans of savage beasts  
Would often make their sleep-time horrible  
For those poor wretches ; and, from home y-driven,  
They'd flee their rocky shelters at approach  
Of boar, the spumy-lipped, or lion strong,  
And in the midnight yield with terror up  
To those fierce guests their beds of out-spread leaves.

And yet in those days not much more than now  
Would generations of mortality  
Leave the sweet light of fading life behind.  
Indeed, in those days here and there a man,  
More oftener snatched upon, and gulped by fangs,  
Afforded the beasts a food that roared alive,  
Echoing through groves and hills and forest-trees,  
Even as he viewed his living flesh entombed  
Within a living grave ; whilst those whom flight  
Had saved, with bone and body bitten, shrieked,  
Pressing their quivering palms to loathsome sores,  
With horrible voices for eternal death—  
Until, forlorn of help, and witless what  
Might medicine their wounds, the writhing pangs  
Took them from life. But not in those far times  
Would one lone day give over unto doom  
A soldiery in thousands marching on  
Beneath the battle-banners, nor would then  
The ramping breakers of the main seas dash  
Whole argosies and crews upon the rocks.  
But ocean uprisen would often rave in vain,  
Without all end or outcome, and give up  
Its empty menacings as lightly too ;  
Nor soft seductions of a sérene sea  
Could lure by laughing billows any man  
Out to disaster : for the science bold  
Of ship-sailing lay dark in those far times.  
Again, 'twas *then* that lack of food gave o'er

Men's fainting limbs to dissolution : now  
 'Tis plenty overwhelms. Unwary, they  
 Oft for themselves themselves would then outpour  
 The poison ; now, with nicer art, themselves  
 They give the drafts to others.

### BEGINNINGS OF CIVILISATION—1009-1455

Afterwards,

When huts they had procured and pelts and fire,  
 And when the woman, joined unto the man,  
 Withdrew with him into one dwelling place,  
 . . . . .  
 Were known ; and when they saw an offspring born  
 From out themselves, then first the human race  
 Began to soften. For 'twas now that fire  
 Rendered their shivering frames less staunch to bear,  
 Under the canopy of the sky, the cold ;  
 And Love reduced their shaggy hardness ;  
 And children, with the prattle and the kiss,  
 Soon broke the parents' haughty temper down.  
 Then, too, did neighbours 'gin to league as friends,  
 Eager to wrong no more or suffer wrong,  
 And urged for children and the womankind  
 Mercy, of fathers, whilst with cries and gestures  
 They stammered hints how meet it was that all  
 Should have compassion on the weak. And still,  
 Though concord not in every wise could then  
 Begotten be, a good, a goodly part  
 Kept faith inviolate—or else mankind  
 Long since had been unutterably cut off,  
 And propagation never could have brought  
 The species down the ages.

Lest, perchance,  
 Concerning these affairs thou ponderest

In silent meditation, let me say  
 'Twas lightning brought primevally to earth  
 The fire for mortals, and from thence hath spread  
 O'er all the lands the flames of heat. For thus  
 Even now we see so many objects, touched  
 By the celestial flames, to flash aglow,  
 When thunderbolt has dowered them with heat.  
 Yet also when a many-branchèd tree,  
 Beaten by winds, writhes swaying to and fro,  
 Pressing 'gainst branches of a neighbour tree,  
 There by the power of mighty rub and rub  
 Is fire engendered ; and at times out-flares  
 The scorching heat of flame, when boughs do chafe  
 Against the trunks. And of these causes, either  
 May well have given to mortal men the fire.  
 Next, food to cook and soften in the flame  
 The sun instructed, since so oft they saw  
 How objects mellowed, when subdued by warmth  
 And by the raining blows of fiery beams,  
 Through all the fields.

5  
 And more and more each day  
 Would men more strong in sense, more wise in heart,  
 Teach them to change their earlier mode and life  
 By fire and new devices. Kings began  
 Cities to found and citadels to set,  
 As strongholds and asylums for themselves,  
 And flocks and fields to portion for each man  
 After the beauty, strength, and sense of each—  
 For beauty then imported much, and strength  
 Had its own rights supreme. Thereafter, wealth  
 Discovered was, and gold was brought to light,  
 Which soon of honour stripped both strong and fair ;  
 For men, however beautiful in form  
 Or valorous, will follow in the main  
 The rich man's party. Yet were man to steer

His life by sounder reasoning, he'd own  
 Abounding riches, if with mind content  
 He lived by thrift ; for never, as I guess,  
 Is there a lack of little in the world.  
 But men wished glory for themselves and power  
 Even that their fortunes on foundations firm  
 Might rest forever, and that they themselves,  
 The opulent, might pass a quiet life—  
 In vain, in vain ; since, in the strife to climb  
 On to the heights of honour, men do make  
 Their pathway terrible ; and even when once  
 They reach them, envy like the thunderbolt  
 At times will smite, O hurling headlong down  
 To murkiest Tartarus, in scorn ; for, lo,  
 All summits, all regions loftier than the rest,  
 Smoke, blasted as by envy's thunderbolts ;  
 So better far in quiet to obey,  
 Than to desire chief mastery of affairs    //  
 And ownership of empires. Be it so ;  
 And let the weary sweat their life-blood out  
 All to no end, battling in hate along    //  
 The narrow path of man's ambition ;  
 Since all their wisdom is from others' lips,  
 And all they seek is known from what they've heard  
 And less from what they've thought. Nor is this folly  
 Greater to-day, nor greater soon to be,  
 Than 'twas of old.

And therefore kings were slain,  
 And pristine majesty of golden thrones  
 And haughty sceptres lay o'erturned in dust ;  
 And crowns, so splendid on the sovereign heads,  
 Soon bloody under the proletarian feet,  
 Groaned for their glories gone—for erst o'er-much  
 Dreaded, thereafter with more greedy zest  
 Trampled beneath the rabble heel. Thus things

Down to the vilest lees of brawling mobs  
 Succumbed, whilst each man sought unto himself  
 Dominion and supremacy. So next  
 Some wiser heads instructed men to found  
 The magisterial office, and did frame  
 Codes that they might consent to follow laws.  
 For humankind, o'er wearied with a life  
 Fostered by force, was ailing from its feuds ;  
 And so the sooner of its own free will  
 Yielded to laws and strictest codes. For since  
 Each hand made ready in its wrath to take  
 A vengeance fiercer than by man's fair laws  
 Is now conceded, men on this account  
 Loathed the old life fostered by force. 'Tis thence  
 That fear of punishments defiles each prize  
 Of wicked days ; for force and fraud ensnare  
 Each man around, and in the main recoil  
 On him from whence they sprung. Not easy 'tis  
 For one who violates by ugly deeds  
 The bonds of common peace to pass a life  
 Composed and tranquil. For albeit he 'scape  
 The race of gods and men, he yet must dread  
 'Twill not be hid forever—since, indeed,  
 So many, oft babbling on amid their dreams  
 Or raving in sickness, have betrayed themselves  
 (As stories tell) and publishèd at last  
 Old secrets and the sins.

But nature 'twas

Urged men to utter various sounds of tongue  
 And need and use did mould the names of things,  
 About in same wise as the lack-speech years  
 Compel young children unto gesturings,  
 Making them point with finger here and there  
 At what's before them. For each creature feels  
 By instinct to what use to put his powers.

Ere yet the bull-calf's scarce begotten horns  
Project above his brows, with them he 'gins  
Enraged to butt and savagely to thrust.

But whelps of panthers and the lion's cubs  
With claws and paws and bites are at the fray  
Already, when their teeth and claws be scarce  
As yet engendered. So again, we see

All breeds of wingèd creatures trust to wings  
And from their fledgling pinions seek to get  
A fluttering assistance. Thus, to think

That in those days some man apportioned round  
To things their names, and that from him men learned  
Their first nomenclature, is foolery.

For why could *he* mark everything by words  
And utter the various sounds of tongue, what time  
The rest may be supposed powerless

To do the same? And, if the rest had not  
Already one with other usèd words,

Whence was implanted in the teacher, then,  
Fore-knowledge of their use, and whence was given  
To him alone primordial faculty

To know and see in mind what 'twas he willed?  
Besides, one only man could scarce subdue

An overmastered multitude to choose

To get by heart *his* names of things. A task  
Not easy 'tis in any wise to teach

And to persuade the deaf concerning what

'Tis needful for to do. For ne'er would they  
Allow, nor ne'er in anywise endure

Perpetual vain dingdong in their ears

Of spoken sounds unheard before. And what,  
At last, in this affair so wondrous is,

That human race (in whom a voice and tongue  
Were now in vigour) should by divers words  
Denote its objects, as each divers sense

Might prompt ?—since even the speechless herds, aye,  
since

The very generations of wild beasts  
Are wont dissimilar and divers sounds  
To rouse from in them, when there's fear or pain,  
And when they burst with joys. And this, forsooth,  
'Tis thine to know from plainest facts : when first  
Huge flabby jowls of mad Molossian hounds,  
Baring their hard white teeth, begin to snarl,  
They threaten, with infuriate lips peeled back,  
In sounds far other than with which they bark  
And fill with voices all the regions round.  
And when with fondling tongue they start to lick  
Their puppies, or do toss them round with paws,  
Feigning with gentle bites to gape and snap,  
They fawn with yelps of voice far other then  
Than when, alone within the house, they bay,  
Or whimpering slink with cringing sides from blows.  
Again the neighing of the horse, is that  
Not seen to differ likewise, when the stud  
In buoyant flower of his young years raves,  
Goaded by wingèd Love, amongst the mares,  
And when with widening nostrils out he snorts  
The call to battle, and when haply he  
Whinnies at times with terror-quaking limbs ?  
Lastly, the flying race, the dappled birds,  
Hawks, ospreys, sea-gulls, searching food and life  
Amid the ocean billows in the brine,  
Utter at other times far other cries  
Than when they fight for food, or with their prey  
Struggle and strain. And birds there are which change  
With changing weather their own raucous songs—  
As long-lived generations of the crows  
Or flocks of rooks, when they be said to cry  
For rain and water and to call at times



For winds and gales. Ergo, if divers moods  
 Compel the brutes, though speechless evermore,  
 To send forth divers sounds, O truly then  
 How much more likely 'twere that mortal men  
 In those days could with many a different sound  
 Denote each separate thing.

And now what cause *1111*

Hath spread divinities of gods abroad  
 Through mighty nations, and filled the cities full  
 Of the high altars, and led to practices  
 Of solemn rites in season—rites which still  
 Flourish in midst of great affairs of state  
 And midst great centres of man's civic life,  
 The rites whence still in poor mortality  
 Is grafted that quaking awe which rears aloft  
 Still the new temples of gods from land to land  
 And drives mankind to visit them in throngs  
 On holy days—'tis not so hard to give  
 Reason thereof in speech. Because, in sooth,  
 Even in those days would the race of man  
 Be *(seeing) excelling visages of gods* *... in appearing*  
 With mind awake ; and in his sleeps, yet more,—  
 Bodies of wondrous growth. And, thus, to these  
 Would men attribute sense, because they seemed  
 To move their limbs and speak pronouncements high,  
 Befitting glorious visage and vast powers.  
 And men would give them an eternal life,  
 Because their visages forevermore  
 Were there before them,<sup>1</sup> and their shapes remained,  
 And chiefly, however, because men would not think  
 Beings augmented with such mighty powers  
 Could well by any force o'er-mastered be.  
 And men would think them in their happiness  
 Excelling far, because the fear of death

<sup>1</sup> By means of the perpetual succession of idol-films.

Vexèd no one of them at all, and since  
 At same time in men's sleeps men saw them do  
 So many wonders, and yet feel therefrom  
 Themselves no weariness. Besides, men marked  
 How in a fixèd order rolled around  
 The systems of the sky, and changèd times  
 Of annual seasons, nor were able then  
 To know thereof the causes. Therefore 'twas  
 Men would take refuge in consigning all  
 Unto divinities, and in feigning all  
 Was guided by their nod. And in the sky  
 They set the seats and vaults of gods, because  
 Across the sky night and the moon are seen  
 To roll along—moon, day, and night, and night's  
 Old awesome constellations evermore,  
 And the night-wandering fireballs of the sky,  
 And flying flames, clouds, and the sun, the rains,  
 Snow and the winds, the lightnings, and the hail,  
 And the swift rumblings, and the hollow roar  
 Of mighty menacings forevermore.

O humankind unhappy!—when it ascribed  
 Unto divinities such awesome deeds,  
 And coupled thereto rigours of fierce wrath!  
 What groans did men on that sad day beget  
 Even for themselves, and O what wounds for us,  
 What tears for our children's children! Nor, O man,  
 Is thy true piety in this: with head  
 Under the veil, still to be seen to turn  
 Fronting a stone, and ever to approach  
 Unto all altars; nor so prone on earth  
 Forward to fall, to spread upturnèd palms  
 Before the shrines of gods, nor yet to dew  
 Altars with profuse blood of four-foot beasts,  
 Nor vows with vows to link. But rather this:  
 To look on all things with a master eye

And mind at peace. For when we gaze aloft  
Upon the skiey vaults of yon great world  
And ether, fixèd high o'er twinkling stars,  
And into our thought there come the journeyings  
Of sun and moon, O then into our breasts,  
O'erburdened already with their other ills,  
Begins forthwith to rear its sudden head  
One more misgiving : lest o'er us, perchase,  
It be the gods' immeasurable power  
That rolls, with varied motion, round and round  
The far white constellations. For the lack  
Of aught of reasons tries the puzzled mind :  
Whether was ever a birth-time of the world,  
And whether, likewise, any end shall be  
How far the ramparts of the world can still  
Outstand this strain of ever-rousèd motion,  
Or whether, divinely with eternal weal  
Endowed, they can through endless tracts of age  
Glide on, defying the o'er-mighty powers  
Of the immeasurable ages. Lo,  
What man is there whose mind with dread of gods  
Cringes not close, whose limbs with terror-spell  
Crouch not together, when the parchèd earth  
Quakes with the horrible thunderbolt amain,  
And across the mighty sky the rumblings run ?  
Do not the peoples and the nations shake,  
And haughty kings do they not hug their limbs,  
Strook through with fear of the divinities,  
Lest for aught foully done or madly said  
The heavy time be now at hand to pay ?  
When, too, fierce force of fury-winds at sea  
Sweepeth a navy's admiral down the main  
With his stout legions and his elephants,  
Doth he not seek the peace of gods with vows,  
And beg in prayer, a-tremble, lullèd winds

And friendly gales ?—in vain, since, often up-caught  
 In fury-cyclones, is he borne along,  
 For all his mouthings, to the shoals of doom.  
 Ah, so irrevocably some hidden power  
 Betramples forevermore affairs of men,  
 And visibly grindeth with its heel in mire  
 The lictors' glorious rods and axes dire,  
 Having them in derision ! Again, when earth  
 From end to end is rocking under foot,  
 And shaken cities ruin down, or threaten  
 Upon the verge, what wonder is it then  
 That mortal generations abase themselves,  
 And unto gods in all affairs of earth  
 Assign as last resort almighty powers  
 And wondrous energies to govern all ?

Now for the rest : copper and gold and iron  
 Discovered were, and with them silver's weight  
 And power of lead, when with prodigious heat  
 The conflagrations burned the forest trees  
 Among the mighty mountains, by a bolt  
 Of lightning from the sky, or else because  
 Men, warring in the woodlands, on their foes  
 Had hurlèd fire to frighten and dismay,  
 Or yet because, by goodness of the soil  
 Invited, men desired to clear rich fields  
 And turn the countryside to pasture-lands,  
 Or slay the wild and thrive upon the spoils.  
 (For hunting by pit-fall and by fire arose  
 Before the art of hedging the covert round  
 With net or stirring it with dogs of chase.)  
 Howso the fact, and from what cause soever  
 The flamy heat with awful crack and roar  
 Had there devourèd to their deepest roots  
 The forest trees and baked the earth with fire,  
 Then from the boiling veins began to ooze

O rivulets of silver and of gold,  
Of lead and copper too, collecting soon  
Into the hollow places of the ground.  
And when men saw the coolèd lumps anon  
To shine with splendour-sheen upon the ground,  
Much taken with that lustrous smooth delight,  
They 'gan to pry them out, and saw how each  
Had got a shape like to its earthy mould.  
Then would it enter their heads how these same lumps,  
If melted by heat, could into any form  
Or figure of things be run, and how, again,  
If hammered out, they could be nicely drawn  
To sharpest point or finest edge, and thus  
Yield to the forgers tools and give them power  
To chop the forest down, to hew the logs,  
To shave the beams and planks, besides to bore  
And punch and drill. And men began such work  
At first as much with tools of silver and gold  
As with the impetuous strength of the stout copper ;  
But vainly—since their over-mastered power  
Would soon give way, unable to endure,  
Like copper, such hard labour. In those days  
Copper it was that was the thing of price ;  
And gold lay useless, blunted with dull edge.  
Now lies the copper low, and gold hath come  
Unto the loftiest honours. Thus it is  
That rolling ages change the times of things :  
What erst was of a price, becomes at last  
A discard of no honour ; whilst another  
Succeeds to glory, issuing from contempt,  
And day by day is sought for more and more,  
And, when 'tis found, doth flower in men's praise,  
Object of wondrous honour.

Now, Memmius,  
How nature of iron discovered was, thou mayst

Of thine own self divine. Man's ancient arms  
 Were hands, and nails and teeth, stones too and boughs—  
 Breakage of forest trees—and flame and fire,  
 As soon as known. Thereafter force of iron  
 And copper discovered was ; and copper's use  
 Was known ere iron's, since more tractable  
 Its nature is and its abundance more.  
 With copper men to work the soil began,  
 With copper to rouse the hurly waves of war,  
 To straw the monstrous wounds, and seize away  
 Another's flocks and fields. For unto them,  
 Thus armèd, all things naked of defence  
 Readily yielded. Then by slow degrees  
 The sword of iron succeeded, and the shape  
 Of brazen sickle into scorn was turned :  
 With iron to cleave the soil of earth they 'gan,  
 And the contentions of uncertain war  
 Were rendered equal.

And, lo, man was wont  
 Armèd to mount upon the ribs of horse  
 And guide him with the rein, and play about  
 With right hand free, of times before he tried  
 Perils of war in yokèd chariot ;  
 And yokèd pairs abreast came earlier  
 Than yokes of four, or scythèd chariots  
 Whereinto clomb the men-at-arms. And next  
 The Punic folk did train the elephants—  
 Those curst Lucanian oxen, hideous,  
 The serpent-handed, with turrets on their bulks—  
 To dure the wounds of war and panic-strike  
 The mighty troops of M<sup>ar</sup>s. Thus Discord sad  
 Begat the one Thing after other, to be  
 The terror of the nations under arms,  
 And day by day to horrors of old war  
 She added an increase.

Bulls, too, they tried  
In war's grim business ; and essayed to send  
Outrageous boars against the foes. And some  
Sent on before their ranks puissant lions  
With armèd trainers and with masters fierce  
To guide and hold in chains—and yet in vain,  
Since fleshed with pell-mell slaughter, fierce they flew,  
And blindly through the squadrons havoc wrought,  
Shaking the frightful crests upon their heads,  
Now here, now there. Nor could the horseman calm  
Their horses, panic-breasted at the roar,  
And rein them round to front the foe. With spring  
The infuriate she-lions would up-leap  
Now here, now there ; and whoso came apace  
Against them, these they'd rend across the face ;  
And others unwitting from behind they'd tear  
Down from their mounts, and twining round them, bring  
Tumbling to earth, o'ermastered by the wound,  
And with those powerful fangs and hookèd claws  
Fasten upon them. Bulls would toss their friends,  
And trample under foot, and from beneath  
Rip flanks and bellies of horses with their horns,  
And with a threat'ning forehead jam the sod ;  
And boars would gore with stout tusks their allies,  
Splashing in fury their own blood on spears  
Splintered in their own bodies, and would fell  
In rout and ruin infantry and horse.  
For there the beasts-of-saddle tried to scape  
The savage thrusts of tusk by shying off,  
Or rearing up with hoofs a-paw in air.  
In vain—since there thou mightest see them sink,  
Their sinews severed, and with heavy fall  
Bestrew the ground. And such of these as men  
Supposed well-trained long ago at home,  
Were in the thick of action seen to foam

In fury, from the wounds, the shrieks, the flight,  
 The panic, and the tumult ; nor could men  
 Aught of their numbers rally. For each breed  
 And various of the wild beasts fled apart  
 Hither or thither, as often in wars to-day  
 Flee those Lucanian oxen, by the steel  
 Grievously mangled, after they have wrought  
 Upon their friends so many a dreadful doom.  
 (If 'twas, indeed, that thus they did at all :  
 But scarcely I'll believe that men could not  
 With mind foreknow and see, as sure to come,  
 Such foul and general disaster.—This  
 We, then, may hold as true in the great All,  
 In divers worlds on divers plan create,—  
 Somewhere afar more likely than upon  
 One certain earth.) But men chose this to do  
 Less in the hope of conquering than to give  
 Their enemies a goodly cause of woe,  
 Even though thereby they perished themselves,  
 Since weak in numbers and since wanting arms.

Now, clothes of roughly inter-plaited strands  
 Were earlier than loom-wove coverings ;  
 The loom-wove later than man's iron is,  
 Since iron is needful in the weaving art,  
 Nor by no other means can there be wrought  
 Such polished tools—the treadles, spindles, shuttles,  
 And sounding yarn-beams. And nature forced the men,  
 Before the woman kind, to work the wool :  
 For all the male kind far excels in skill,  
 And cleverer is by much—until at last  
 The rugged farmer folk jeered at such tasks,  
 And so were eager soon to give them o'er  
 To women's hands, and in more hardy toil  
 To harden arms and hands.

But nature herself,



Mother of things, was the first seed-sower  
And primal grafter ; since the berries and acorns,  
Dropping from off the trees, would there beneath  
Put forth in season swarms of little shoots ;  
Hence too men's fondness for ingrafting slips  
Upon the boughs and setting out in holes  
The young shrubs o'er the fields. Then would they try  
Ever new modes of tilling their loved crofts,  
And mark they would how earth improved the taste  
Of the wild fruits by fond and fostering care.  
And day by day they'd force the woods to move  
Still higher up the mountain, and to yield  
The place below for tilth, that there they might,  
On plains and uplands, have their meadow-plats,  
Cisterns and runnels, crops of standing grain,  
And happy vineyards, and that all along  
O'er hillocks, intervalles, and plains might run  
The silvery-green belt of olive-trees,  
Marking the plotted landscape ; even as now  
Thou seest so marked with varied loveliness  
All the terrain which men adorn and plant  
With rows of goodly fruit-trees and hedge round  
With thriving shrubberies sown.

But by the mouth

To imitate the liquid notes of birds  
Was earlier far 'mongst men than power to make,  
By measured song, melodious verse and give  
Delight to ears. And whistlings of the wind  
Athrough the hollows of the reeds first taught  
The peasantry to blow into the stalks  
Of hollow hemlock-herb. Then bit by bit  
They learned sweet plainings, such as pipe out-pours,  
Beaten by finger-tips of singing men,  
When heard through unpathed groves and forest deeps  
And woodsy meadows, through the untrod haunts

Of shepherd folk and spots divinely still.  
Thus time draws forward each and everything  
Little by little unto the midst of men,  
And reason uplifts it to the shores of light.  
These tunes would soothe and glad the minds of mortals  
When sated with food,—for songs are welcome then.  
And often, lounging with friends in the soft grass  
Beside a river of water, underneath  
A big tree's branches, merrily they'd refresh  
Their frames, with no vast outlay—most of all  
If the weather were smiling and the times of the year  
Were painting the green of the grass around with flowers.  
Then jokes, then talk, then peals of jollity  
Would circle round ; for then the rustic muse  
Was in her glory ; then would antic Mirth  
Prompt them to garland head and shoulders about  
With chaplets of intertwinèd flowers and leaves,  
And to dance onward, out of tune, with limbs  
Clownishly swaying, and with clownish foot  
To beat our mother earth—from whence arose  
Laughter and peals of jollity, for, lo,  
Such frolic acts were in their glory then,  
Being more new and strange. And wakeful men  
Found solaces for their unsleeping hours  
In drawing forth variety of notes,  
In modulating melodies, in running  
With puckered lips along the tunèd reeds,  
Whence, even in our day do the watchmen guard  
These old traditions, and have learnèd well  
To keep true measure. And yet they no whit  
Do get a larger fruit of gladsomeness  
Than got the woodland aborigines  
In olden times. For *what* we have at hand—  
If theretofore naught sweeter we have known—

That chiefly pleases and seems best of all ;  
But then some later, likely better, find  
Destroys its worth and changes our desires  
Regarding good of yesterday.

And thus  
Began the loathing of the acorn ; thus  
Abandoned were those beds with grasses strewn  
And with the leaves beladen. Thus, again,  
Fell into new contempt the pelts of beasts—  
Erstwhile a robe of honour, which, I guess,  
Aroused in those days envy so malign  
That the first wearer went to woeful death  
By ambuscades,—and yet that hairy prize,  
Rent into rags by greedy foemen there  
And splashed by blood, was ruined utterly  
Beyond all use or vantage. Thus of old  
'Twas pelts, and of to-day 'tis purple and gold  
That cark men's lives with cares and weary with war.  
Wherefore, methinks, resides the greater blame  
With us vain men to-day : for cold would rack,  
Without their pelts, the naked sons of earth ;  
But us it nothing hurts to do without  
The purple vestment, broiderèd with gold  
And with imposing figures, if we still  
Make shift with some mean garment of the Plebs.  
So man in vain futilities toils on  
Forever and wastes in idle cares his years—  
Because, of very truth, he hath not learnt  
What the true end of getting is, nor yet  
At all how far true pleasure may increase.  
And 'tis desire for better and for more  
Hath carried by degrees mortality  
Out onward to the deep, and rousèd up  
From the far bottom mighty waves of war.

But sun and moon, those watchmen of the world,<sup>1</sup>  
 With their own lanterns traversing around  
 The mighty, the revolving vault, have taught  
 Unto mankind that seasons of the years  
 Return again, and that the Thing takes place  
 After a fixèd plan and order fixed.

Already would they pass their life, hedged round  
 By the strong towers ; and cultivate an earth  
 All portioned out and boundaried ; already  
 Would the sea flower with sail-wingèd ships ;  
 Already men had, under treaty pacts,  
 Confederates and allies, when poets began  
 To hand heroic actions down in verse ;  
 Nor long ere this had letters been devised—  
 Hence is our age unable to look back  
 On what has gone before, except where reason  
 Shows us a footprint.

Sailings on the seas,  
 Tillings of fields, walls, laws, and arms, and roads,  
 Dress and the like, all prizes, all delights  
 Of finer life, poems, pictures, chiselled shapes  
 Of polished sculptures—all these arts were learned  
 By practice and the mind's experience,  
 As men walked forward step by eager step.  
 Thus time draws forward each and everything  
 Little by little into the midst of men,  
 And reason uplifts it to the shores of light.  
 For one thing after other did men see  
 Grow clear by intellect, till with their arts  
 They've now achieved the súpreme pinnacle.

<sup>1</sup> *Mundi* (" of the world ") in the Latin syntax depends on *templum* (" vault ").

BOOK VI

## SUMMARY

Proem (1-95).

I. Great meteorological phenomena, and earthquakes  
(96-607).

(a) Lightning flashes and thunder-bolts (96-422).

(b) Water-spouts, clouds, rainbows, etc. (423-534).

(c) Earthquakes (535-607).

II. Extraordinary and paradoxical telluric phenomena  
(608-1135).

(a) The sea neither increases nor diminishes (608-638).

(b) Volcanoes and eruptions of Aetna in particular  
(639-702).

(c) The Nile (703-737).

(d) Birdless lakes and places (738-839).

(e) Strange fountains (840-905).

(f) Magnets (906-1087).

(g) Pestilences (1088-1135).

Conclusion. The Plague at Athens (1136-1284).

## BOOK VI

### PROEM—1-95

'T WAS Athens first, the glorious in name,  
That whilom gave to hapless sons of men  
The sheaves of harvest, and re-ordered life,  
And decreed laws ; and she the first that gave  
Life its sweet solaces, when she begat  
A man of heart so wise, who whilom poured  
All wisdom forth from his truth-speaking mouth ;  
The glory of whom, though dead, is yet to-day,  
Because of those discoveries divine  
Renowned of old, exalted to the sky.  
For when saw he that well-nigh everything  
Which needs of man most urgently require  
Was ready to hand for mortals, and that life,  
As far as might be, was established safe,  
That men were lords in riches, honour, praise,  
And eminent in goodly fame of sons,  
And that they yet, O yet, within the home,  
Still had the anxious heart which vexèd life  
Unpausingly with torments of the mind,  
And raved perforce with angry plaints, then he,  
Then he, the master, did perceive that 'twas  
The vessel itself which worked the bane, and all,  
However wholesome, which from here or there  
Was gathered into it, was by that bane  
Spoilt from within,—in part, because he saw  
The vessel so cracked and leaky that nowise  
'T could ever be filled to brim ; in part because  
He marked how it polluted with foul taste

Whate'er it got within itself. So he,  
 The master, then by his truth-speaking words,  
 Purgèd the breasts of men, and set the bounds  
 Of lust and terror, and exhibited  
 The súpreme good whither we all endeavour,  
 And showed the path whereby we might arrive  
 Thereunto by a little cross-cut straight,  
 And what of ills in all affairs of mortals  
 Upsprang and flitted deviously about  
 (Whether by chance or force), since nature thus  
 Had destined ; and from out what gates a man  
 Should sally to each combat. And he proved  
 That mostly vainly doth the human race  
 Roll in its bosom the grim waves of care.  
 For just as children tremble and fear all  
 In the viewless dark, so even we at times  
 Dread in the light so many things that be  
 No whit more fearsome than what children feign,  
 Shuddering, will be upon them in the dark.  
 This terror then, this darkness of the mind,  
 Not sunrise with its flaring spokes of light,  
 Nor glittering arrows of morning can disperse,  
 But only nature's aspect and her law.  
 Wherefore the more will I go on to weave  
 In verses this my undertaken task.

And since I've taught thee that the world's great vaults  
 Are mortal and that sky is fashionèd  
 Of frame e'en born in time, and whatsoe'er  
 Therein go on and must perforce go on

. . . . .  
 The most I have unravelled ; what remains  
 Do thou take in, besides ; since once for all  
 To climb into that chariot <sup>1</sup> renowned

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* of the Muses. Many lines lost here.



Of winds arise ; and they appeasèd are  
So that all things again . . .

Which were, are changèd now, with fury stilled ;  
All other movements through the earth and sky  
Which mortals gaze upon (O anxious oft  
In quaking thoughts !), and which abase their minds  
With dread of deities and press them crushed  
Down to the earth, because their ignorance  
Of cosmic causes forces them to yield  
All things unto the empery of gods  
And to concede the kingly rule to them.  
For even *those* men who have learned full well  
That godheads lead a long life free of care,  
If yet meanwhile they wonder by what plan  
Things can go on (and chiefly yon high things  
Observed o'erhead on the ethereal coasts),  
Again are hurried back unto the fears  
Of old religion and adopt again  
Harsh masters, deemed almighty,—wretched men,  
Unwitting what can be and what cannot,  
And by what law to each its scope prescribed,  
Its boundary stone that clings so deep in Time.  
Wherefore the more are they borne wandering on  
By blindfold reason. And, Memmius, unless  
From out thy mind thou spuest all of this  
And castest far from thee all thoughts which be  
Unworthy gods and alien to their peace,  
Then often will the holy majesties  
Of the high gods be harmful unto thee,  
As by thy thought degraded,—not, indeed,  
That essence supreme of gods could be by this  
So outraged as in wrath to thirst to seek  
Revenues keen ; but even because thyself

Thou plaguest with the notion that the gods,  
Even they, the Calm Ones in serene repose,  
Do roll the mighty waves of wrath on wrath ;  
Nor wilt thou enter with a sérene breast  
Shrines of the gods ; nor wilt thou able be  
In tranquil peace of mind to take and know  
Those images which from their holy bodies  
Are carried into intellects of men,  
As the announcers of their form divine.  
What sort of life will follow after this  
'Tis thine to see. But that afar from us  
Veriest reason may drive such life away,  
Much yet remains to be embellished yet  
In polished verses, albeit hath issued forth  
So much from me already : lo, there is  
The law and aspect of the sky to be  
By reason grasped ; there are the tempest times  
And the bright lightnings to be hymnèd now—  
Even what they do and from what cause soe'er  
They're borne along—that thou mayst tremble not,  
Marking off regions of prophetic skies  
For auguries, O foolishly distraught  
Even as to whence the flying flame hath come,  
Or to which half of heaven it turns, or how  
Through wallèd places it hath wound its way,  
Or, after proving its dominion there,  
How it hath speeded forth from thence amain—  
Whereof nowise the causes do men know,  
And think divinities are working there.  
Do thou, Calliope, ingenious Muse,  
Solace of mortals and delight of gods,  
Point out the course before me, as I race  
On to the white line of the utmost goal,  
That I may get with signal praise the crown,  
With thee my guide !

## GREAT METEOROLOGICAL PHENOMENA, ETC.—96—607

And so in first place, then,  
With thunder are shaken the blue deeps of heaven,  
Because the ethereal clouds, scudding aloft,  
Together clash, what time 'gainst one another  
The winds are battling. For never a sound there comes  
From out the sérene regions of the sky ;  
But wheresoever in a host more dense  
The clouds foregather, thence more often comes  
A crash with mighty rumbling. And, again,  
Clouds cannot be of so condensed a frame  
As stones and timbers, nor again so fine  
As mists and flying smoke ; for then perforce  
They'd either fall, borne down by their brute weight,  
Like stones, or, like the smoke, they'd powerless be  
To keep their mass, or to retain within  
Frore snows and storms of hail. And they give forth  
O'er skiey levels of the spreading world  
A sound on high, as linen-awning, stretched  
O'er mighty theatres, gives forth at times  
A cracking roar, when much 'tis beaten about  
Betwixt the poles and cross-beams. Sometimes, too,  
Asunder rent by wanton gusts, it raves  
And imitates the tearing sound of sheets  
Of paper—even this kind of noise thou mayst  
In thunder hear—or sound as when winds whirl  
With lashings and do buffet about in air  
A hanging cloth and flying paper-sheets.  
For sometimes, too, it chanches that the clouds  
Cannot together crash head-on, but rather  
Move side-wise and with motions contrary  
Graze each the other's body without speed,  
From whence that dry sound grateth on our ears,



Besides, among the clouds are waves, and these  
Give, as they roughly break, a rumbling roar ;  
As when along deep streams or the great sea  
Breaks the loud surf. It happens, too, whenever  
Out from one cloud into another falls  
The fiery energy of thunderbolt,  
That straightaway the cloud, if full of wet,  
Extinguishes the fire with mighty noise ;  
As iron, white from the hot furnaces,  
Sizzles, when speedily we've plunged its glow  
Down the cold water. Further, if a cloud  
More dry receive the fire, 'twill suddenly  
Kindle to flame and burn with monstrous sound,  
As if a flame with whirl of winds should range  
Along the laurel-tressèd mountains far,  
Upburning with its vast assault those trees ;  
Nor is there aught that in the crackling flame  
Consumes with sound more terrible to man  
Than Delphic laurel of Apollo lord.  
Oft, too, the multitudinous crash of ice  
And down-pour of swift hail gives forth a sound  
Among the mighty clouds on high ; for when  
The wind hath packed them close, each mountain mass  
Of rain-cloud, there congealèd utterly  
And mixed with hail-stones, breaks and booms . . .

•            •            •            •            •            •  
Likewise, it lightens, when the clouds have struck,  
By their collision, forth the seeds of fire :  
As if a stone should smite a stone or steel,  
For light then too leaps forth and fire then scatters  
The shining sparks. But with our ears we get  
The thunder after eyes behold the flash,  
Because forever things arrive the ears  
More tardily than the eyes—as thou mayst see  
From this example too : when markest thou

Some man far yonder felling a great tree  
 With double-edgèd axe, it comes to pass  
 Thine eye beholds the swinging stroke before  
 The blow gives forth a sound athrough thine ears :  
 Thus also we behold the flashing ere  
 We hear the thunder, which dischargèd is  
 At same time with the fire and by same cause,  
 Born of the same collision.

In following wise

The clouds suffuse with leaping light the lands,  
 And the storm flashes with tremulous élan :  
 When the wind hath invaded a cloud, and, whirling there,  
 Hath wrought (as I have shown above) the cloud  
 Into a hollow with a thickened crust,  
 It becomes hot of own velocity :  
 Just as thou seest how motion will o'erheat  
 And set ablaze all objects,—verily  
 A leaden ball, hurtling through length of space,  
 Even melts. Therefore, when this same wind a-fire  
 Hath split black cloud, it scatters the fire-seeds,  
 Which, so to say, have been pressed out by force  
 Of sudden from the cloud ;—and these do make  
 The pulsing flashes of flame ; thence followeth  
 The detonation which attacks our ears  
 More tardily than aught which comes along  
 Unto the sight of eyeballs. This takes place—  
 As know thou mayst—at times when clouds are dense  
 And one upon the other piled aloft  
 With wonderful upheavings—nor be thou  
 Deceived because we see how broad their base  
 From underneath, and not how high they tower.  
 For make thine observations at a time  
 When winds shall bear athwart the horizon's blue  
 Clouds like to mountain-ranges moving on,  
 Or when about the sides of mighty peaks

Thou seest them one upon the other massed  
And burdening downward, anchored in high repose,  
With the winds sepulchred on all sides round :  
Then canst thou know their mighty masses, then  
Canst view their caverns, as if builded there  
Of beetling crags ; which, when the hurricanes  
In gathered storm have fillèd utterly,  
Then, prisonèd in clouds, they rave around  
With mighty roarings, and within those dens  
Bluster like savage beasts, and now from here,  
And now from there, send growlings through the clouds,  
And seeking an outlet, whirl themselves about,  
And roll from 'mid the clouds the seeds of fire,  
And heap them multitudinously there,  
And in the hollow furnaces within  
Wheel flame around, until from bursted cloud  
In forky flashes they have gleamèd forth.

Again, from following cause it comes to pass  
That yon swift golden hue of liquid fire  
Darts downward to the earth : because the clouds  
Themselves must hold abundant seeds of fire ;  
For, when they be without all moisture, then  
They be for most part of a flamy hue  
And a resplendent. And, indeed, they must  
Even from the light of sun unto themselves  
Take multitudinous seeds, and so perforce  
Redden and pour their bright fires all abroad.  
And therefore, when the wind hath driven and thrust,  
Hath forced and squeezed into one spot these clouds,  
They pour abroad the seeds of fire pressed out,  
Which make to flash these colours of the flame.  
Likewise, it lightens also when the clouds  
Grow rare and thin along the sky ; for, when  
The wind with gentle touch unravels them  
And breaketh asunder as they move, those seeds

Which make the lightnings must by nature fall ;  
 At such an hour the horizon lightens round  
 Without the hideous terror of dread noise  
 And skiey uproar.

To proceed apace,

What sort of nature thunderbolts possess  
 Is by their strokes made manifest and by  
 The brand-marks of their searing heat on things,  
 And by the scorched scars exhaling round  
 The heavy fumes of sulphur. For all these  
 Are marks, O not of wind or rain, but fire.  
 Again, they often enkindle even the roofs  
 Of houses and inside the very rooms  
 With swift flame hold a fierce dominion.  
 Know thou that nature fashionèd this fire  
 Subtler than fires all other, with minute  
 And dartling bodies,—a fire 'gainst which there's naught  
 Can in the least hold out : the thunderbolt,  
 The mighty, passes through the hedging walls  
 Of houses, like to voices or a shout,—  
 Through stones, through bronze it passes, and it melts  
 Upon the instant bronze and gold ; and makes,  
 Likewise, the wines sudden to vanish forth,  
 The wine-jars still intact,—because, ye see,  
 Its heat arriving renders loose and porous  
 Readily all the wine-jar's earthen sides,  
 And winding its way within, it scattereth  
 The elements primordial of the wine  
 With speedy dissolution—process which  
 Even in an age the fiery steam of sun  
 Could not accomplish, however puissant he  
 With his hot coruscations : so much more  
 Agile and overpowering is this force.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now in what manner engendered are these things,



How fashionèd of such impetuous strength  
As to cleave towers asunder, and houses all  
To overtopple, and to wrench apart  
Timbers and beams, and heroes' monuments  
To pile in ruins and upheave amain,  
And to take breath forever out of men,  
And to o'erthrow the cattle everywhere,—  
Yes, by what force the lightnings do all this,  
All this and more, I will unfold to thee,  
Nor longer keep thee in mere promises.

The bolts of thunder, then, must be conceived  
As all begotten in those crasser clouds  
Up-piled aloft ; for, from the sky serene  
And from the clouds of lighter density,  
None are sent forth forever. That 'tis so  
Beyond a doubt, fact plain to sense declares :  
To wit, at such a time the densèd clouds  
So mass themselves through all the upper air  
That we might think that round about all murk  
Had parted forth from Acheron and filled  
The mighty vaults of sky—so grievously,  
As gathers thus the storm-clouds' gruesome might,  
Do faces of black horror hang on high—  
When tempest begins its thunderbolts to forge.  
Besides, full often also out at sea  
A blackest thunderhead, like cataract  
Of pitch hurled down from heaven, and far away  
Bulging with murkiness, down on the waves  
Falls with vast uproar, and draws on amain  
The darkling tempests big with thunderbolts  
And hurricanes, itself the while so crammed  
Tremendously with fires and winds, that even  
Back on the lands the people shudder round  
And seek for cover. Therefore, as I said,  
The storm must be conceived as o'er our head

Towering most high ; for never would the clouds  
O'erwhelm the lands with such a massy dark,  
Unless up-builed heap on lofty heap,  
To shut the round sun off. Nor could the clouds,  
As on they come, engulf with rain so vast  
As thus to make the rivers overflow  
And fields to float, if ether were not thus  
Furnished with lofty-pilèd clouds. Lo, then,  
Here be all things fulfilled with winds and fires—  
Hence the long lightnings and the thunders loud.  
For, verily, I've taught thee even now  
How cavernous clouds hold seeds innumerable  
Of fiery exhalations, and they must  
From off the sunbeams and the heat of these  
Take many still. And so, when that same wind  
(Which, haply, into one region of the sky  
Collects those clouds) hath pressed from out the same  
The many fiery seeds, and with that fire  
Hath at the same time inter-mixed itself,  
O then and there that wind, a whirlwind now,  
Deep in the belly of the cloud spins round  
In narrow confines, and sharpens there inside  
In glowing furnaces the thunderbolt.  
For in a two-fold manner is that wind  
Enkindled all : it trembles into heat  
Both by its own velocity and by  
Repeated touch of fire. Thereafter, when  
The energy of wind is heated through  
And the fierce impulse of the fire hath sped  
Deeply within, O then the thunderbolt,  
Now ripened, so to say, doth suddenly  
Splinter the cloud, and the aroused flash  
Leaps onward, lumining with forky light  
All places round. And followeth anon  
A clap so heavy that the skiey vaults,

As if asunder burst, seem from on high  
To engulf the earth. Then fearfully a quake  
Pervades the lands, and 'long the lofty skies  
Run the far rumblings. For at such a time  
Nigh the whole tempest quakes, shook through and  
through,

And rousèd are the roarings,—from which shock  
Comes such resounding and abounding rain,  
That all the murky ether seems to turn  
Now into rain, and, as it tumbles down,  
To summon the fields back to primeval floods :  
So big the rains that be sent down on men  
By burst of cloud and by the hurricane,  
What time the thunder-clap, from burning bolt  
That cracks the cloud, flies forth along. At times  
The force of wind, excited from without,  
Smiteth into a cloud already hot  
With a ripe thunderbolt. And when that wind  
Hath splintered that cloud, then down there cleaves  
forthwith

Yon fiery coil of flame which still we call,  
Even with our fathers' word, a thunderbolt.  
The same thing haps toward every other side  
Whither that force hath swept. It happens, too,  
That sometimes force of wind, though hurtled forth  
Without all fire, yet in its voyage through space  
Igniteth, whilst it comes along, along,—  
Losing some larger bodies which cannot  
Pass, like the others, through the bulks of air,—  
And, scraping together out of air itself  
Some smaller bodies, carries them along,  
And these, commingling, by their flight make fire :  
Much in the manner as oft a leaden ball  
Grows hot upon its aery course, the while  
It loseth many bodies of stark cold

And taketh into itself along the air  
 New particles of fire. It happens, too,  
 That force of blow itself arouses fire,  
 When force of wind, a-cold and hurtled forth  
 Without all fire, hath strook somewhere amain—  
 No marvel, because, when with terrific stroke  
 'Thas smitten, the elements of fiery-stuff  
 Can stream together from out the very wind  
 And, simultaneously, from out that thing  
 Which then and there receives the stroke : as flies  
 The fire when with the steel we hack the stone ;  
 Nor yet, because the force of steel's a-cold,  
 Rush the less speedily together there  
 Under the stroke its seeds of radiance hot.  
 And therefore, thuswise must an object too  
 Be kindled by a thunderbolt, if haply  
 'Thas been adapt and suited to the flames.  
 Yet force of wind must not be rashly deemed  
 As altogether and entirely cold—  
 That force which is dischargèd from on high  
 With such stupendous power ; but if 'tis not  
 Upon its course already kindled with fire,  
 It yet arriveth warmed and mixed with heat.

And, now, the speed and stroke of thunderbolt  
 Is so tremendous, and with glide so swift  
 Those thunderbolts rush on and down, because  
 Their rousèd force itself collects itself  
 First always in the clouds, and then prepares  
 For the huge effort of their going-forth ;  
 Next, when the cloud no longer can retain  
 The increment of their fierce impetus,  
 Their force is pressèd out, and therefore flies  
 With impetus so wondrous, like to shots  
 Hurl'd from the powerful Roman catapults.  
 Note, too, this force consists of elements

Both small and smooth, nor is there aught that can  
With ease resist such nature. For it darts  
Between and enters through the pores of things ;  
And so it never falters in delay  
Despite innumerable collisions, but  
Flies shooting onward with a swift élan.  
Next, since by nature always every weight  
Bears downward, doubled is the swiftness then  
And that élan is still more wild and dread,  
When, verily, to weight are added blows,  
So that more madly and more fiercely then  
The thunderbolt shakes into shivers all  
That blocks its path, following on its way.  
Then, too, because it comes along, along  
With one continuing élan, it must  
Take on velocity anew, anew,  
Which still increases as it goes, and ever  
Augments the bolt's vast powers and to the blow  
Gives larger vigour ; for it forces all,  
All of the thunder's seeds of fire, to sweep  
In a straight line unto one place, as 'twere,—  
Casting them one by other, as they roll,  
Into that onward course. Again, perchance,  
In coming along, it pulls from out the air  
Some certain bodies, which by their own blows  
Enkindle its velocity. And, lo,  
It comes through objects leaving them unharmed,  
It goes through many things and leaves them whole,  
Because the liquid fire flieth along  
Athrough their pores. And much it does transfix,  
When these primordial atoms of the bolt  
Have fallen upon the atoms of these things  
Precisely where the inter-twinèd atoms  
Are held together. And, further, easily  
Brass it unbinds and quickly fuseth gold,

Because its force is so minutely made  
 Of tiny parts and elements so smooth  
 That easily they wind their way within,  
 And, when once in, quickly unbind all knots  
 And loosen all the bonds of union there.

And most in autumn is shaken the house of heaven,  
 The house so studded with the glittering stars,  
 And the whole earth around,—most too in spring  
 When flowery times unfold themselves : for, lo,  
 In the cold season is there lack of fire,  
 And winds are scanty in the hot, and clouds  
 Have not so dense a bulk. But when, indeed,  
 The seasons of heaven are betwixt these twain,  
 The divers causes of the thunderbolt  
 Then all concur ; for then both cold and heat  
 Are mixèd in the cross-seas <sup>1</sup> of the year,  
 So that a discord rises among things  
 And air in vast tumultuosity  
 Billows, infuriate with the fires and winds—  
 Of which the both are needed by the cloud  
 For fabrication of the thunderbolt.  
 For the first part of heat and last of cold  
 Is the time of spring ; wherefore must things unlike  
 Do battle one with other, and, when mixed,  
 Tumultuously rage. And when rolls round  
 The latest heat mixed with the earliest chill—  
 The time which bears the name of autumn—then  
 Likewise fierce cold-spells wrestle with fierce heats.  
 On this account these seasons of the year  
 Are nominated “ cross-seas.”—And no marvel  
 If in those times the thunderbolts prevail  
 And storms are rousèd turbulent in heaven,  
 Since then both sides in dubious warfare rage

<sup>1</sup> As if in a strait connecting two divided oceans of time and thus eddying with counter-currents.

Tumultuously, the one with flames, the other  
With winds and with waters mixed with winds.

This, this it is, O Memmius, to see through  
The very nature of fire-fraught thunderbolt ;  
O this it is to mark by what blind force  
It maketh each effect, and not, O not  
To unwind Etrurian scrolls oracular,  
Inquiring tokens of occult will of gods,  
Even as to whence the flying flame hath come,  
Or to which half of heaven it turns, or how  
Through wallèd places it hath wound its way,  
Or, after proving its dominion there,  
How it hath speeded forth from thence amain,  
Or what the thunderstroke portends of ill  
From out high heaven. But if Jupiter  
And other gods shake those refulgent vaults  
With dread reverberations and hurl fire  
Whither it pleases each, why smite they not  
Mortals of reckless and revolting crimes,  
That such may pant from a transpiercèd breast  
Forth flames of the red levin—unto men  
A drastic lesson ?—*why* is rather *he*—  
O he self-conscious of no foul offence—  
Involved in flames, though innocent, and clasped  
Up-caught in skiey whirlwind and in fire ?  
Nay, why, then, aim they at eternal wastes,  
And spend themselves in vain ?—perchance, even so  
To exercise their arms and strengthen shoulders ?  
Why suffer they the Father's javelin  
To be so blunted on the earth ? And why  
Doth he himself allow it, nor spare the same  
Even for his enemies ? O why most oft  
Aims he at lofty places ? Why behold we  
Marks of his lightnings most on mountain tops ?  
Then for what reason shoots he at the sea ?—

What sacrilege have waves and bulk of brine  
 And floating fields of foam been guilty of ?  
 Besides, if 'tis his will that we beware  
 Against the lightning-stroke, why feareth he  
 To grant us power for to behold the shot ?  
 And, contrariwise, if wills he to o'erwhelm us,  
 Quite off our guard, with fire, why thunders he  
 Off in yon quarter, so that we may shun ?  
 Why rouseth he beforehand darkling air  
 And the far din and rumblings ? And O how  
 Canst thou believe he shoots at one same time  
 Into diverse directions ? Or darest thou  
 Contend that never hath it come to pass  
 That divers strokes have happened at one time ?  
 But oft and often hath it come to pass,  
 And often still it must, that, even as showers  
 And rains o'er many regions fall, so too  
 Dart many thunderbolts at one same time.  
 Again, why never hurtles Jupiter  
 A bolt upon the lands nor pours abroad  
 Clap upon clap, when skies are cloudless all ?  
 Or, say, doth he, so soon as ever the clouds  
 Have come thereunder, then into the same  
 Descend in person, that from thence he may  
 Near-by decide upon the stroke of shaft ?  
 And, lastly, why, with devastating bolt  
 Shakes he asunder holy shrines of gods  
 And his own thrones of splendour, and to-breaks  
 The well-wrought idols of divinities,  
 And robs of glory his own images  
 By wound of violence ?

But to return apace,

Easy it is from these same facts to know  
 In just what wise those things (which from their sort



The Greeks have namèd “ bellows ” )<sup>1</sup> do come down,  
Dischargèd from on high, upon the seas.

For it haps that sometimes from the sky descends  
Upon the seas a column, as if pushed,  
Round which the surges seethe, tremendously  
Aroused by puffing gusts ; and whatsoe'er  
Of ships are caught within that tumult then  
Come into éxtrême peril, dashed along.

This haps when sometimes wind's aroused force  
Can't burst the cloud it tries to, but down-weighs  
That cloud, until 'tis like a column from sky  
Upon the seas pushed downward—gradually,  
As if a Somewhat from on high were shoved  
By fist and nether thrust of arm, and lengthened  
Far to the waves. And when the force of wind  
Hath rived this cloud, from out the cloud it rushes  
Down on the seas, and starts among the waves  
A wondrous seething, for the eddying whirl  
Descends and downward draws along with it  
That cloud of ductile body. And soon as ever  
'Thas shoved unto the levels of the main  
That laden cloud, the whirl suddenly then  
Plunges its whole self into the waters there  
And rouses all the sea with monstrous roar,  
Constraining it to seethe. It happens too  
That very vortex of the wind involves  
Itself in clouds, scraping from out the air  
The seeds of cloud, and counterfeits, as 'twere,  
The “ bellows ” pushed from heaven. And when this  
shape

Hath dropped upon the lands and burst apart,  
It belches forth immeasurable might  
Of whirlwind and of blast. Yet since 'tis formed  
At most but rarely, and on land the hills

<sup>1</sup> See Diels, *Doxographi*, p. 26 (says Guissani).

Must block its way, 'tis seen more oft out there  
 On the broad prospect of the level main  
 Along the free horizons.

Into being

The clouds condense, when in this upper space  
 Of the high heaven have gathered suddenly,  
 As round they flew, unnumbered particles—  
 World's rougher ones, which can, though interlinked  
 With scanty couplings, yet be fastened firm,  
 The one on other caught. These particles  
 First cause small clouds to form ; and, thereupon,  
 These catch the one on other and swarm in a flock  
 And grow by their conjoining, and by winds  
 Are borne along, along, until collects  
 The tempest fury. Happens, too, the nearer  
 The mountain summits neighbour to the sky,  
 The more unceasingly their far crags smoke  
 With the thick darkness of swart cloud, because  
 When first the mists do form, ere ever the eyes  
 Can there behold them (tenuous as they be),  
 The carrier-winds will drive them up and on  
 Unto the topmost summits of the mountain ;  
 And then at last it happens, when they be  
 In vaster throng upgathered, that they can  
 By this their condensation lie revealed,  
 And that at same time they are seen to surge  
 From very vertex of the mountain up  
 Into far ether. For very fact and feeling,  
 As we up-climb high mountains, proveth clear  
 That windy are those upward regions free.  
 Besides, the clothes hung-out along the shore,  
 When in they take the clinging moisture, prove  
 That nature lifts from over all the sea  
 Unnumbered particles. Whereby the more  
 'Tis manifest that many particles

Even from the salt upheavings of the main  
Can rise together to augment the bulk  
Of massèd clouds. For moistures in these twain  
Are near akin. Besides, from out all rivers,  
As well as from the land itself, we see  
Up-rising mists and steam, which like a breath  
Are forcèd out from them and borne aloft,  
To curtain heaven with their murk, and make,  
By slow foregathering, the skiey clouds.  
For, in addition, lo, the heat on high  
Of constellated ether burdens down  
Upon them, and by sort of condensation  
Weaveth beneath the azure firmament  
The reek of darkling cloud. It happens, too,  
That hither to the skies from the Beyond  
Do come those particles which make the clouds  
And flying thunderheads. For I have taught  
That this their number is innumerable  
And infinite the sum of the Abyss,  
And I have shown with what stupendous speed  
Those bodies fly and how they're wont to pass  
Amain through incommunicable space.  
Therefore, 'tis not exceeding strange, if oft  
In little time tempest and darkness cover  
With bulking thunderheads hanging on high  
The oceans and the lands, since everywhere  
Through all the narrow tubes of yonder ether,  
Yea, so to speak, through all the breathing-holes  
Of the great upper-world encompassing,  
There be for the primordial elements  
Exits and entrances.

Now come, and how  
The rainy moisture thickens into being  
In the lofty clouds, and how upon the lands  
'Tis then discharged in down-pour of large showers,

I will unfold. And first triumphantly  
 Will I persuade thee that up-rise together,  
 With clouds themselves, full many seeds of water  
 From out all things, and that they both increase—  
 Both clouds and water which is in the clouds—  
 In like proportion, as our frames increase  
 In like proportion with our blood, as well  
 As sweat or any moisture in our members.  
 Besides, the clouds take in from time to time  
 Much moisture risen from the broad marine,—  
 Whilst the winds bear them o'er the mighty sea,  
 Like hanging fleeces of white wool. Thuswise,  
 Even from all rivers is there lifted up  
 Moisture into the clouds. And when therein  
 The seeds of water so many in many ways  
 Have come together, augmented from all sides,  
 The close-jammed clouds then struggle to discharge  
 Their rain-storms for a two-fold reason : lo,  
 The wind's force crowds them, and the very excess  
 Of storm-clouds (massèd in a vaster throng)  
 Giveth an urge and pressure from above  
 And makes the rains out-pour. Besides when, too,  
 The clouds are winnowed by the winds, or scattered,  
 Smitten on top by heat of sun, they send  
 Their rainy moisture, and distil their drops,  
 Even as the wax, by fiery warmth on top,  
 Wasteth and liquefies abundantly.  
 But comes the violence of the bigger rains  
 When violently the clouds are weighted down  
 Both by their cumulated<sup>1</sup> mass and by  
 The onset of the wind. And rains are wont  
 To endure awhile and to abide for long,  
 When many seeds of waters are aroused,  
 And clouds on clouds and racks on racks outstream

<sup>1</sup> *Cumulata* in the Latin is of course not ablative.

In pilèd layers and are borne along  
From every quarter, and when all the earth  
Smoking exhales her moisture. At such a time  
When sun with beams amid the tempest-murk  
Hath shone against the showers of black rains,  
Then in the swart clouds there emerges bright  
The radiance of the bow.

And as to things  
Not mentioned here which of themselves do grow  
Or of themselves are gendered, and all things  
Which in the clouds condense to being—all,  
Snow and the winds, hail and the hoar-frosts chill,  
And freezing, mighty force—of lakes and pools  
The mighty hardener, and mighty check  
Which in the winter curbeth everywhere  
The rivers as they go—'tis easy still,  
Soon to discover and with mind to see  
How they all happen, whereby genderèd,  
When once thou well hast understood just what  
Functions have been vouchsafèd from of old  
Unto the procreant atoms of the world.

Now come, and what the law of earthquakes is  
Hearken, and first of all take care to know  
That the under-earth, like to the earth around us,  
Is full of windy caverns all about ;  
And many a pool and many a grim abyss  
She bears within her bosom, ay, and cliffs  
And jaggèd scarps ; and many a river, hid  
Beneath her chine, rolls rapidly along  
Its billows and plunging boulders. For clear fact  
Requires that earth must be in every part  
Alike in constitution. Therefore, earth,  
With these things underneath affixed and set,  
Trembleth above, jarred by big down-tumblings,  
When time hath underminèd the huge caves,

The subterranean. Yea, whole mountains fall,  
 And instantly from spot of that big jar  
 There quiver the tremors far and wide abroad.  
 And with good reason : since houses on the street  
 Begin to quake throughout, when jarred by a cart  
 Of no large weight ; and, too, the furniture  
 Within the house up-bounds, when a paving-block  
 Gives either iron rim of the wheels a jolt.  
 It happens, too, when some prodigious bulk  
 Of age-worn soil is rolled from mountain slopes  
 Into tremendous pools of water dark,  
 That the reeling land itself is rocked about  
 By the water's undulations ; as a basin  
 Sometimes won't come to rest until the fluid  
 Within it ceases to be rocked about  
 In random undulations.

And besides,

When subterranean winds, up-gathered there  
 In the hollow deeps, bulk forward from one spot,  
 And press with the big urge of mighty powers  
 Against the lofty grottos, then the earth  
 Bulks to that quarter whither push amain  
 The headlong winds. Then all the builded houses  
 Above ground—and the more, the higher up-reared  
 Unto the sky—lean ominously, careening  
 Into the same direction ; and the beams,  
 Wrenched forward, over-hang, ready to go.  
 Yet dread men to believe that there awaits  
 The nature of the mighty world a time  
 Of doom and cataclysm, albeit they see  
 So great a bulk of lands to bulge and break !  
 And lest the winds blew back again, no force  
 Could rein things in nor hold from sure career  
 On to disaster. But now because those winds  
 Blow back and forth in alternation strong,

And, so to say, rallying charge again,  
And then repulsed retreat, on this account  
Earth oftener threatens than she brings to pass  
Collapses dire. For to one side she leans,  
Then back she sways ; and after tottering  
Forward, recovers then her seats of poise.  
Thus, this is why whole houses rock, the roofs  
More than the middle stories, middle more  
Than lowest, and the lowest least of all.

Arises, too, this same great earth-quaking,  
When wind and some prodigious force of air,  
Collected from without or down within  
The old telluric deeps, have hurled themselves  
Amain into those caverns sub-terrene,  
And there at first tumultuously chafe  
Among the vasty grottos, borne about  
In mad rotations, till their lashèd force  
Aroused out-bursts abroad, and then and there,  
Riving the deep earth, makes a mighty chasm—  
What once in Syrian Sidon did befall,  
And once in Peloponnesian Aegium,  
Twain cities which such out-break of wild air  
And earth's convulsion, following hard upon,  
O'erthrew of old. And many a wallèd town,  
Besides, hath fall'n by such omnipotent  
Convulsions on the land, and in the sea  
Engulfed hath sunken many a city down  
With all its populace. But if, indeed,  
They burst not forth, yet is the very rush  
Of the wild air and fury-force of wind  
Then dissipated, like an ague-fit,  
Through the innumerable pores of earth,  
To set her all a-shake—even as a chill,  
When it hath gone into our marrow-bones,  
Sets us convulsively, despite ourselves,

A-shivering and a-shaking. Therefore, men  
 With two-fold terror bustle in alarm  
 Through cities to and fro : they fear the roofs  
 Above the head ; and underfoot they dread  
 The caverns, lest the nature of the earth  
 Suddenly rend them open, and she gape,  
 Herself asunder, with tremendous maw,  
 And, all confounded, seek to chock it full  
 With her own ruins. Let men, then, go on  
 Feigning at will that heaven and earth shall be  
 Inviolable, entrusted evermore  
 To an eternal weal : and yet at times  
 The very force of danger here at hand  
 Prods them on some side with this goad of fear—  
 This among others—that the earth, withdrawn  
 Abruptly from under their feet, be hurried down,  
 Down into the abyss, and the Sum-of-Things <sup>1</sup>  
 Be following after, utterly fordone,  
 Till be but wrack and wreckage of a world.

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#### EXTRAORDINARY AND PARADOXICAL TELLURIC PHENOMENA—608-1135

In chief, men marvel nature renders not  
 Bigger and bigger the bulk of ocean, since  
 So vast the down-rush of the waters be,  
 And every river out of every realm  
 Cometh thereto ; and add the random rains  
 And flying tempests, which spatter every sea  
 And every land bedew ; add their own springs :  
 Yet all of these unto the ocean's sum  
 Shall be but as the increase of a drop.

<sup>1</sup> The reference is here not to the whole universe, but only to the created world known to man.



Wherefore 'tis less a marvel that the sea,  
The mighty ocean, increaseth not. Besides,  
Sun with his heat draws off a mighty part :  
Yea, we behold that sun with burning beams  
To dry our garments dripping all with wet ;  
And many a sea, and far out-spread beneath,  
Do we behold. Therefore, however slight  
The portion of wet that sun on any spot  
Culls from the level main, he still will take  
From off the waves in such a wide expanse  
Abundantly. Then, further, also winds,  
Sweeping the level waters, can bear off  
A mighty part of wet, since we behold  
Oft in a single night the highways dried  
By winds, and soft mud crusted o'er at dawn.

Again, I've taught thee that the clouds bear off  
Much moisture too, up-taken from the reaches  
Of the mighty main, and sprinkle it about  
O'er all the zones, when rain is on the lands  
And winds convey the aery racks of vapour.  
Lastly, since earth is porous through her frame,  
And neighbours on the seas, girdling their shores,  
The water's wet must seep into the lands  
From briny ocean, as from lands it comes  
Into the seas. For brine is filtered off,  
And then the liquid stuff seeps back again  
And all re-poureth at the river-heads,  
Whence in fresh-water currents it returns  
Over the lands, adown the channels which  
Were cleft ertwhile and erstwhile bore along  
The liquid-footed floods.

And now the cause  
Whereby athrough the throat of Aetna's Mount  
Such vast tornado-fires out-breathe at times,  
I will unfold : for with no middling might

Of devastation the flamy tempest rose  
 And held dominion in Sicilian fields :  
 Drawing upon itself the upturned faces  
 Of neighbouring clans, what time they saw afar  
 The skiey vaults a-fume and sparkling all,  
 And filled their bosoms with dread anxiety  
 Of what new thing nature were travailing at.

In these affairs it much behooveth thee  
 To look both wide and deep, and far abroad  
 To peer to every quarter, that thou mayst  
 Remember how boundless is the Sum-of-Things,  
 And mark how infinitely small a part  
 Of the whole Sum is this one sky of ours—  
 O not so large a part as is one man  
 Of the whole earth. And plainly if thou viewest  
 This cosmic fact, placing it square in front,  
 And plainly understandest, thou wilt leave  
 Wondering at many things. For who of us  
 Wondereth if some one gets into his joints  
 A fever, gathering head with fiery heat,  
 Or any another dolorous disease  
 Along his members ? For anon the foot  
 Grows blue and bulbous ; often the sharp twinge  
 Seizes the teeth, attacks the very eyes ;  
 Out-breaks the sacred fire,<sup>1</sup> and, crawling on  
 Over the body, burneth every part  
 It seizeth on, and works its hideous way  
 Along the frame. No marvel this, since, lo,  
 Of things innumerable be seeds enough,  
 And this our earth and sky do bring to us  
 Enough of bane from whence can grow the strength  
 Of maladies uncounted. Thuswise, then,  
 We must suppose to all the sky and earth  
 Are ever supplied from out the infinite

<sup>1</sup> The erysipelas.

All things, O all in stores enough whereby  
The shaken earth can of a sudden move,  
And fierce typhoons can over sea and lands  
Go tearing on, and Aetna's fires o'erflow,  
And heaven become a flame-burst. For that, too,  
Happens at times, and the celestial vaults  
Glow into fire, and rainy tempests rise  
In heavier congregation, when, perchance,  
The seeds of water have foregathered thus  
From out the infinite. "Aye, but passing huge  
The fiery turmoil of that conflagration!"  
So sayst thou; well, huge many a river seems  
To him that erstwhile ne'er a larger saw;  
Thus, huge seems tree or man; and everything  
Which mortal sees the biggest of each class,  
That he imagines to be "huge"; though yet  
All these, with sky and land and sea to boot,  
Are all as nothing to the sum entire  
Of the all-Sum.

But now I will unfold  
At last how yonder suddenly angered flame  
Out-blows abroad from vasty furnaces  
Aetnaen. First, the mountain's nature is  
All under-hollow, propped about, about  
With caverns of basaltic piers. And, lo,  
In all its grottos be there wind and air—  
For wind is made when air hath been uprused  
By violent agitation. When this air  
Is heated through and through, and, raging round,  
Hath made the earth and all the rocks it touches  
Horribly hot, and hath struck off from them  
Fierce fire of swiftest flame, it lifts itself  
And hurtles thus straight upwards through its throat  
Into high heav'n, and thus bears on afar  
Its burning blasts and scattereth afar

Its ashes, and rolls a smoke of pitchy murk  
 And heaveth the while boulders of wondrous weight—  
 Leaving no doubt in thee that 'tis the air's  
 Tumultuous power. Besides, in mighty part,  
 The sea there at the roots of that same mount  
 Breaks its old billows and sucks back its surf.  
 And grottos from the sea pass in below  
 Even to the bottom of the mountain's throat.  
 Herethrough thou must admit there go . . .

And the conditions force [the water and air]  
 Deeply to penetrate from the open sea,  
 And to out-blow abroad, and to up-bear  
 Thereby the flame, and to up-cast from deeps  
 The boulders, and to rear the clouds of sand.  
 For at the top be "bowls,"<sup>1</sup> as people there  
 Are wont to name what we at Rome do call  
 The throats and mouths.

There be, besides, some things  
 Of which 'tis not enough one only cause  
 To state—but rather several, whereof one  
 Will be the true : lo, if thou shouldst espy  
 Lying afar some fellow's lifeless corse,  
 'Twere meet to name all causes of a death,  
 That cause of *his* death might thereby be named :  
 For prove thou mayst he perished not by steel,  
 By cold, nor even by poison nor disease,  
 Yet somewhat of this sort hath come to him  
 We know—And thus we have to say the same  
 In divers cases.

Toward the summer, Nile  
 Waxeth and overfloweth the champaign,  
 Unique in all the landscape, river sole  
 Of the Aegyptians. In mid-season heats

<sup>1</sup> Latin *crateres*, whence English craters.

Often and oft he waters Aegypt o'er,  
Either because in summer against his mouths  
Come those north-winds which at that time of year  
Men name the Etesian blasts, and, blowing thus  
Upstream, retard, and, forcing back his waves,  
Fill him o'erfull and force his flow to stop.  
For out of doubt these blasts which driven be  
From icy constellations of the pole  
Are borne straight up the river. Comes that river  
From forth the sultry places down the south,  
Rising far up in midmost realm of day,  
Among black generations of strong men  
With sun-baked skins. 'Tis possible, besides,  
That a big bulk of pilèd sand may bar  
His mouths against his onward waves, when sea,  
Wild in the winds, tumbles the sand to inland ;  
Whereby the river's outlet were less free,  
Likewise less headlong his descending floods.  
It may be, too, that in this season rains  
Are more abundant at its fountain head,  
Because the Etesian blasts of those north-winds  
Then urge all clouds into those inland parts.  
And, soothly, when they're thus foregathered there,  
Urged yonder into midmost realm of day,  
Then, crowded against the lofty mountain sides,  
They're massed and powerfully pressed. Again,  
Perchance, his waters wax, O far away,  
Among the Aethiopians' lofty mountains,  
When the all-beholding sun with thawing beams  
Drives the white snows to flow into the vales.

Now come ; and unto thee I will unfold,  
As to the Birdless <sup>1</sup> spots and Birdless tarns,  
What sort of nature they are furnished with.  
First, as to name of "birdless,"—that derives

<sup>1</sup> Latin *Averna*, whence the familiar Vergilian *Avernus*.

From very fact, because they noxious be  
Unto all birds. For when above those spots  
In horizontal flight the birds have come,  
Forgetting to oar with wings, they furl their sails,  
And, with down-drooping of their delicate necks,  
Fall headlong into earth, if haply such  
The nature of the spots, or into water,  
If haply spreads thereunder Birdless tarn.  
Such spot's at Cumae, where the mountains smoke,  
Charged with the pungent sulphur, and increased  
With steaming springs. And such a spot there is  
Within the walls of Athens, even there  
On summit of Acropolis, beside  
Fane of Tritonian Pallas bountiful,  
Where never cawing crows can wing their course,  
Not even when smoke the altars with good gifts,—  
But evermore they flee—yet not from wrath  
Of Pallas, grieved at that espial old,  
As poets of the Greeks have sung the tale ;  
But very nature of the place compels.  
In Syria also—as men say—a spot  
Is to be seen, where also four-foot kinds,  
As soon as ever they've set their steps within,  
Collapse, o'ercome by its essential power,  
As if there slaughtered to the under-gods.  
Lo, all these wonders work by natural law,  
And from what causes they are brought to pass  
The origin is manifest ; so, haply,  
Let none believe that in these regions stands  
The gate of Orcus, nor us then suppose,  
Haply, that thence the under-gods draw down  
Souls to dark shores of Acheron—as stags,  
The wing-footed, are thought to draw to light,  
By sniffing nostrils, from their dusky lairs  
The wriggling generations of wild snakes.

How far removèd from true reason is this,  
Perceive thou straight ; for now I'll try to say  
Somewhat about the very fact.

And, first,

This do I say, as oft I've said before :  
In earth are atoms of things of every sort ;  
And know, these all thus rise from out the earth—  
Many life-giving which be good for food,  
And many which can generate disease  
And hasten death, O many primal seeds  
Of many things in many modes—since earth  
Contains them mingled and gives forth discrete.  
And we have shown before that certain things  
Be unto certain creatures suited more  
For ends of life, by virtue of a nature,  
A texture, and primordial shapes, unlike  
For kinds unlike. Then too 'tis thine to see  
How many things oppressive be and foul  
To man, and to sensation most malign :  
Many meander miserably through ears ;  
Many in-wind athrough the nostrils too,  
Malign and harsh when mortal draws a breath ;  
Of not a few must one avoid the touch ;  
Of not a few must one escape the sight ;  
And some there be all loathsome to the taste ;  
And many, besides, relax the languid limbs  
Along the frame, and undermine the soul  
In its abodes within. To certain trees  
There hath been given so dolorous a shade  
That often they gender achings of the head,  
If one but be beneath, outstretched on the sward.  
There is, again, on Helicon's high hills  
A tree that's wont to kill a man outright  
By fetid odour of its very flower.  
And when the pungent stench of the night-lamp,

Extinguished but a moment since, assails  
 The nostrils, then and there it puts to sleep  
 A man afflicted with the falling sickness  
 And foamings at the mouth. A woman, too,  
 At the heavy castor drowzes back in chair,  
 And from her delicate fingers slips away  
 Her gaudy handiwork, if haply she  
 Hath got the whiff at menstruation-time.  
 Once more, if thou delayest in hot baths,  
 When thou art over-full, how readily  
 From stool in middle of the steaming water  
 Thou tumblest in a fit ! How readily  
 The heavy fumes of charcoal wind their way  
 Into the brain, unless beforehand we  
 Of water 've drunk. But when a burning fever,  
 O'er-mastering man, hath seized upon his limbs,  
 Then odour of wine is like a hammer-blow.  
 And seest thou not how in the very earth  
 Sulphur is gendered and bitumen thickens  
 With noisome stench ?—What direful stenches, too,  
 Scaptensula <sup>1</sup> out-breathes from down below,  
 When men pursue the veins of silver and gold,  
 With pick-axe probing round the hidden realms  
 Deep in the earth ?—Or what of deadly bane  
 The mines of gold exhale ? O what a look,  
 And what a ghastly hue they give to men !  
 And seest thou not, or hearest, how they're wont  
 In little time to perish, and how fail  
 The life-stores in those folk whom mighty power  
 Of grim necessity confineth there  
 In such a task ? Thus, this telluric earth  
 Out-streams with all these dread effluvia  
 And breathes them out into the open world  
 And into the visible regions under heaven.

<sup>1</sup> A mine in Thrace.



Thus, too, those Birdless places must up-send  
 An essence bearing death to wingèd things,  
 Which from the earth rises into the breezes  
 To poison part of skiey space, and when  
 Thither the wingèd is on pennons borne,  
 There, seized by the unseen poison, 'tis ensnared,  
 And from the horizontal of its flight  
 Drops to the spot whence sprang the effluvium.  
 And when 'thas there collapsed, then the same power  
 Of that effluvium takes from all its limbs  
 The relics of its life. That power first strikes  
 The creatures with a wildering dizziness,  
 And then thereafter, when they're once down-fallen  
 Into the poison's very fountains, then  
 Life, too, they vomit out perforce, because  
 So thick the stores of bane around them fume.

Again, at times it happens that this power,  
 This exhalation of the Birdless places,  
 Dispels the air betwixt the ground and birds,  
 Leaving well-nigh a void. And thither when  
 In horizontal flight the birds have come,  
 Forthwith their buoyancy of pennons limps,  
 All useless, and each effort of both wings  
 Falls out in vain. Here, when without all power  
 To buoy themselves and on their wings to lean,  
 Lo, nature constrains them by their weight to slip  
 Down to the earth, and lying prostrate there  
 Along the well-nigh empty void, they spend  
 Their souls through all the openings of their frame.

Further, the water of wells is colder then  
 At summer time, because the earth by heat  
 Is rarefied, and sends abroad in air  
 Whatever seeds it peradventure have  
 Of its own fiery exhalations.

The more, then, the telluric ground is drained  
 Of heat, the colder grows the water hid  
 Within the earth. Further, when all the earth  
 Is by the cold compressed, and thus contracts  
 And, so to say, concretes, it happens, lo,  
 That by contracting it expresses then  
 Into the wells what heat it bears itself.

'Tis said at Hammon's fane a fountain is,  
 In daylight cold and hot in time of night.  
 This fountain men be-wonder over-much,  
 And think that suddenly it seethes in heat  
 By intense sun, the subterranean, when  
 Night with her terrible murk hath cloaked the lands—  
 What's not true reasoning by a long remove :  
 I' faith, when sun o'erhead, touching with beams  
 An open body of water, had no power  
 To render it hot upon its upper side,  
 Though his high light possess such burning glare,  
 How, then, can he, when under the gross earth,  
 Make water boil and glut with fiery heat ?—  
 And, specially, since scarcely potent he  
 Through hedging walls of houses to inject  
 His exhalations hot, with ardent rays.  
 What, then, 's the principle ? Why, this, indeed :  
 The earth about that spring is porous more  
 Than elsewhere the telluric ground, and be  
 Many the seeds of fire hard by the water ;  
 On this account, when night with dew-fraught shades  
 Hath whelmed the earth, anon the earth deep down  
 Grows chill, contracts ; and thuswise squeezes out  
 Into the spring what seeds she holds of fire  
 (As one might squeeze with fist), which render hot  
 The touch and steam of the fluid. Next, when sun,  
 Up-risen, with his rays has split the soil  
 And rarefied the earth with waxing heat,

Again into their ancient abodes return  
The seeds of fire, and all the Hot of water  
Into the earth retires ; and this is why  
The fountain in the daylight gets so cold.  
Besides, the water's wet is beat upon  
By rays of sun, and, with the dawn, becomes  
Rarer in texture under his pulsing blaze ;  
And, therefore, whatso seeds it holds of fire  
It renders up, even as it renders oft  
The frost that it contains within itself  
And thaws its ice and looseneth the knots.  
There is, moreover, a fountain cold in kind  
That makes a bit of tow (above it held)  
Take fire forthwith and shoot a flame ; so, too,  
A pitch-pine torch will kindle and flare round  
Along its waves, wherever 'tis impelled  
Afloat before the breeze. No marvel, this :  
Because full many seeds of heat there be  
Within the water ; and, from earth itself  
Out of the deeps must particles of fire  
Athrough the éntire fountain surge aloft,  
And speed in exhalations into air  
Forth and abroad (yet not in numbers enow  
As to make hot the fountain). And, moreo'er,  
Some force constrains them, scattered through the water,  
Forthwith to burst abroad, and to combine  
In flame above. Even as a fountain far  
There is at Aradus amid the sea,  
Which bubbles out sweet water and disparts  
From round itself the salt waves ; and, behold,  
In many another region the broad main  
Yields to the thirsty mariners timely help,  
Belching sweet waters forth amid salt waves.  
Just so, then, can those seeds of fire burst forth  
Athrough that other fount, and bubble out

Abroad against the bit of tow ; and when  
 They there collect or cleave unto the torch,  
 Forthwith they readily flash aflame, because  
 The tow and torches, also, in themselves  
 Have many seeds of latent fire. Indeed,  
 And seest thou not, when near the nightly lamps  
 Thou bringest a flaxen wick, extinguishèd  
 A moment since, it catches fire before  
 'Thas touched the flame, and in same wise a torch ?  
 And many another object flashes aflame  
 When at a distance, touched by heat alone,  
 Before 'tis steeped in veritable fire.  
 This, then, we must suppose to come to pass  
 In that spring also.

Now to other things !

And I'll begin to treat by what decree  
 Of nature it came to pass that iron can be  
 By that stone drawn which Greeks the magnet call  
 After the country's name (its origin  
 Being in country of Magnesian folk).  
 This stone men marvel at ; and sure it oft  
 Maketh a chain of rings, depending, lo,  
 From off itself ! Nay, thou mayst see at times  
 Five or yet more in order dangling down  
 And swaying in the delicate winds, whilst one  
 Depends from other, cleaving to under-side,  
 And ilk one feels the stone's own power and bonds—  
 So over-masteringly its power flows down.

In things of this sort, much must be made sure  
 Ere thou account of the thing itself canst give,  
 And the approaches roundabout must be ;  
 Wherefore the more do I exact of thee  
 A mind and ears attent.

First, from all things  
 We see soever, evermore must flow,

Must be discharged and strewn about, about,  
 Bodies that strike the eyes, awaking sight.  
 From certain things flow odours evermore,  
 As cold from rivers, heat from sun, and spray  
 From waves of ocean, eater-out of walls  
 Along the coasts. Nor ever cease to seep  
 The varied echoings athrough the air.  
 Then, too, there comes into the mouth at times  
 The wet of a salt taste, when by the sea  
 We roam about ; and so, whene'er we watch  
 The wormwood being mixed, its bitter stings.  
 To such degree from all things is each thing  
 Borne streamingly along, and sent about  
 To every region round ; and nature grants  
 Nor rest nor respite of the onward flow,  
 Since 'tis incessantly we feeling have,  
 And all the time are suffered to descry  
 And smell all things at hand and hear them sound.

Now will I seek again to bring to mind  
 How porous a body all things have—a fact  
 Made manifest in my first canto, too.  
 For, truly, though to know this doth import  
 For many things, yet for this very thing  
 On which straightway I'm going to discourse,  
 'Tis needful most of all to make it sure  
 That naught's at hand but body mixed with void.  
 A first ensample : in grottos, rocks o'erhead  
 Sweat moisture and distil the oozy drops ;  
 Likewise, from all our body seeps the sweat ;  
 There grows the beard, and along our members all  
 And along our frame the hairs. Through all our veins  
 Disseminates the food, and gives increase  
 And aliment down to the éxtreme parts,  
 Even to the tiniest finger-nails. Likewise,  
 Through solid bronze the cold and fiery heat

We feel to pass ; likewise, we feel them pass  
 Through gold, through silver, when we clasp in hand  
 The brimming goblets. And, again, there flit  
 Voices through houses' hedging walls of stone ;  
 Odour seeps through, and cold, and heat of fire  
 That's wont to penetrate even strength of iron.  
 Again, where corselet of the sky <sup>1</sup> girds round

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*     \*

And at same time, some Influence of bane,  
 When from Beyond 'thas stolen into [our world].  
 And tempests, gathering from the earth and sky,  
 Back to the sky and earth absorbed retire—  
 With reason, since there's naught that's fashioned not  
 With body porous.

Furthermore, not all

The particles which be from things thrown off  
 Are furnished with same qualities for sense,  
 Nor be for all things equally adapt.  
 A first ensample : the sun doth bake and parch  
 The earth ; but ice he thaws, and with his beams  
 Compels the lofty snows, up-reared white  
 Upon the lofty hills, to waste away ;  
 Then, wax, if set beneath the heat of him,  
 Melts to a liquid. And the fire, likewise,  
 Will melt the copper and will fuse the gold,  
 But hides and flesh it shrivels up and shrinks.  
 The water hardens the iron just off the fire,  
 But hides and flesh (made hard by heat) it softens.  
 The oleaster-tree as much delights  
 The bearded she-goats, verily as though  
 'Twere nectar-steeped and shed ambrosia ;  
 Than which is naught that burgeons into leaf

<sup>1</sup> This is, I take it, a variation of " the flaming ramparts of the world " —with reference to porosity, as in a corselet of leather.

More bitter food for man. A hog draws back  
 From marjoram oil, and every unguent fears—  
 Fierce poison these unto the bristled hogs,  
 Yet unto us from time to time they seem,  
 As 'twere, to give new life. But, contrariwise,  
 Though unto us the mire be filth most foul,  
 To hogs that mire doth so delightsome seem  
 That they with wallowing from belly to back  
 Are never cloyed.

A point remains, besides,  
 Which best it seems to tell of, ere I go  
 To telling of the fact at hand itself.  
 Since to the varied things assignèd be  
 The many pores, those pores must be diverse  
 In nature one from other, and each have  
 Its very shape, its own direction fixed.  
 And so, indeed, in breathing creatures be  
 The several senses, of which each takes in  
 Unto itself, in its own fashion ever,  
 Its own peculiar object. For we mark  
 How sounds do into one place penetrate,  
 Into another flavours of all juice,  
 And savour of smell into a third. Moreover,  
 One sort through rocks we see to seep, and, lo,  
 One sort to pass through wood, another still  
 Through gold, and others to go out and off  
 Through silver and through glass. For we do see  
 Through some pores form-and-look of things to flow,  
 Through others heat to go, and some things still  
 To speedier pass than others through same pores.  
 Of verity, the nature of these same paths,  
 Varying in many modes (as aforesaid)  
 Because of unlike nature and warp and woof  
 Of cosmic things, constrains it so to be.

Wherefore, since all these matters now have been

Establishèd and settled well for us  
As premises prepared, for what remains  
'Twill not be hard to render clear account  
By means of these, and the whole cause reveal  
Whereby the magnet lures the strength of iron.  
First, stream there must from off the lode-stone seeds  
Innumerable, a very tide, which smites  
By blows that air asunder lying betwixt  
The stone and iron. And when is emptied out  
This space, and a large place between the two  
Is made a void, forthwith the primal germs  
Of iron, headlong slipping, fall conjoined  
Into the vacuum, and the ring itself  
By reason thereof doth follow after and go  
Thuswise with all its body. And naught there is  
That of its own primordial elements  
More thoroughly knit or tighter linked coheres  
Than nature and cold roughness of stout iron.  
Wherefore, 'tis less a marvel what I said,  
That from such elements no bodies can  
From out the iron collect in larger throng  
And be into the vacuum borne along,  
Without the ring itself do follow after.  
And this it does, and followeth on until  
'Thath reached the stone itself and cleaved to it  
By links invisible. Moreover, likewise,  
The motion's assisted by a thing of aid  
(Whereby the process easier becomes),—  
Namely, by this : as soon as rarer grows  
That air in front of the ring, and space between  
Is emptied more and made a void, forthwith  
It happens all the air that lies behind  
Conveys it onward, pushing from the rear.  
For ever doth the circumambient air  
Drub things unmoved, but here it pushes forth



The iron, because upon one side the space  
 Lies void and thus receives the iron in.  
 This air, whereof I am reminding thee,  
 Winding athrough the iron's abundant pores  
 So subtly into the tiny parts thereof,  
 Shoves it and pushes, as wind the ship and sails.  
 The same doth happen in all directions forth :  
 From whatso side a space is made a void,  
 Whether from crosswise or above, forthwith  
 The neighbour particles are borne along  
 Into the vacuum ; for of verity,  
 They're set a-going by poundings from elsewhere,  
 Nor by themselves of own accord can they  
 Rise upwards into the air. Again, all things  
 Must in their framework hold some air, because  
 They are of framework porous, and the air  
 Encompasses and borders on all things.  
 Thus, then, this air in iron so deeply stored  
 Is tossèd evermore in vexèd motion,  
 And therefore drubs upon the ring sans doubt  
 And shakes it up inside. . . .

. . . . .

In sooth, that ring is thither borne along  
 To where 'thas once plunged headlong—thither, lo,  
 Unto the void whereto it took its start.

It happens, too, at times that nature of iron  
 Shrinks from this stone away, accustomed  
 By turns to flee and follow. Yea, I've seen  
 Those Samothracian iron rings leap up,  
 And iron filings in the brazen bowls  
 Seethe furiously, when underneath was set  
 The magnet stone. So strongly iron seems  
 To crave to flee that rock. Such discord great  
 Is gendered by the interposèd brass,

Because, forsooth, when first the tide of brass <sup>1</sup>  
 Hath seized upon and held possession of  
 The iron's open passage-ways, thereafter  
 Cometh the tide of the stone, and in that iron  
 Findeth all spaces full, nor now hath holes  
 To swim through, as before. 'Tis thus constrained  
 With its own current 'gainst the iron's fabric  
 To dash and beat ; by means whereof it spues  
 Forth from itself—and through the brass stirs up—  
 The things which otherwise without the brass  
 It sucks into itself. In these affairs  
 Marvel thou not that from this stone the tide  
 Prevails not likewise other things to move  
 With its own blows : for some stand firm by weight,  
 As gold ; and some cannot be moved forever,  
 Because so porous in their framework they  
 That there the tide streams through without a break,  
 Of which sort stuff of wood is seen to be.  
 Therefore, when iron (which lies between the two)  
 Hath taken in some atoms of the brass,  
 Then do the streams of that Magnesian rock  
 Move iron by their smittings.

Yet these things

Are not so alien from others, that I  
 Of this same sort am ill prepared to name  
 Ensamples still of things exclusively  
 To one another adapt. Thou seest, first,  
 How lime alone cementeth stones ; how wood  
 Only by glue-of-bull with wood is joined—  
 So firmly too that oftener the boards  
 Crack open along the weakness of the grain  
 Ere ever those taurine bonds will lax their hold.  
 The vine-born juices with the water-springs  
 Are bold to mix, though not the heavy pitch

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* the effluent stream of the particles of brass.

With the light oil-of-olive. And purple dye  
Of shell-fish so uniteth with the wool's  
Body alone that it cannot be ta'en  
Away forever—nay, though thou gavest toil  
To restore the same with the Neptunian flood,  
Nay, though all ocean willed to wash it out  
With all its waves. Again, gold unto gold  
Doth not one substance bind, and only one ?  
And is not brass by tin joined unto brass ?  
And other ensamples how many might one find !  
What then ? Nor is there unto thee a need  
Of such long ways and roundabout, nor boots it  
For me much toil on this to spend. More fit  
It is in few words briefly to embrace  
Things many : things whose textures fall together  
So mutually adapt, that cavities  
To solids correspond, these cavities  
Of this thing to the solid parts of that,  
And those of that to solid parts of this—  
Such joinings are the best. Again, some things  
Can be the one with other coupled and held,  
Linkèd by hooks and eyes, as 'twere ; and this  
Seems more the fact with iron and this stone.

Now, of diseases what the law, and whence  
The Influence of bane upgathering can  
Upon the race of man and herds of cattle  
Kindle a devastation fraught with death,  
I will unfold. And, first, I've taught above  
That seeds there be of many things to us  
Life-giving, and that, contrariwise, there must  
Fly many round bringing disease and death.  
When these have, haply, chancèd to collect  
And to derange the atmosphere of earth,  
The air becometh baneful. And, lo, all  
That Influence of bane, that pestilence,

Or from Beyond <sup>1</sup> down through our atmosphere,  
 Like clouds and mists, descends, or else collects  
 From earth herself and rises, when, a-soak  
 And beat by rains unseasonable and suns,  
 Our earth hath then contracted stench and rot.  
 Seest thou not, also, that whoso arrive  
 In region far from fatherland and home  
 Are by the strangeness of the clime and waters  
 Distempered ?—since conditions <sup>2</sup> vary much.  
 For in what else may we suppose the clime  
 Among the Britons to differ from Egypt's own  
 (Where totters awry the axis of the world),  
 Or in what else to differ Pontic clime  
 From Gades' and from climes adown the south,  
 On to black generations of strong men  
 With sun-baked skins ? Even as we thus do see  
 Four climes diverse under the four main-winds  
 And under the four main-regions of the sky,  
 So, too, are seen the colour and face of men  
 Vastly to disagree, and fixed diseases  
 To seize the generations, kind by kind :  
 There is the elephant-disease which down  
 In midmost Aegypt, hard by streams of Nile,  
 Engendered is,—and never elsewhere.  
 In Attica the feet are oft attacked,  
 And in Achaean lands the eyes. And so  
 The divers spots to divers parts and limbs  
 Are noxious ; 'tis a variable air  
 That causes this. Thus when an atmosphere,  
 Alien by chance to us, begins to heave,  
 And noxious airs begin to crawl along,  
 They creep and wind like unto mist and cloud,  
 Slowly, and everything upon their way

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* from outside our world, through the pores in the sky.

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* in the atomic composition of the air.

They disarrange and force to change its state.  
It happens, too, that when they've come at last  
Into this atmosphere of ours, they taint  
And make it like themselves and alien.  
Therefore, asudden this devastation strange,  
This pestilence, upon the waters falls,  
Or settles on the very crops of grain  
Or other meat of men and feed of flocks.  
Or it remains a subtle force, suspense  
In the atmosphere itself ; and when therefrom  
We draw our inhalations of mixed air,  
Into our body equally its bane  
Also we must suck in. In manner like,  
Oft comes the pestilence upon the kine,  
And sickness, too, upon the sluggish sheep.  
Nor aught it matters whether journey we  
To regions adverse to ourselves and change  
The atmospheric cloak, or whether nature  
Herself import a tainted atmosphere  
To us or something strange to our own use  
Which can attack us soon as ever it come.

#### THE PLAGUE AT ATHENS—1136-1284

'Twas such a manner of disease, 'twas such  
Mortal miasma in Cecropian lands  
Whilom reduced the plains to dead men's bones,  
Unpeopled the highways, drained of citizens  
The Athenian town. For coming from afar,  
Rising in lands of Aegypt, traversing  
Reaches of air and floating fields of foam,  
At last on all Pandion's folk it swooped ;  
Whereat by troops unto disease and death  
Were they o'er-given. At first, they'd bear about  
A skull on fire with heat; and eyeballs twain

Red with suffusion of blank glare. Their throats,  
Black on the inside, sweated oozy blood ;  
And the walled pathway of the voice of man  
Was clogged with ulcers ; and the very tongue,  
The mind's interpreter, would trickle gore,  
Weakened by torments, tardy, rough to touch.  
Next when that Influence of bane had choked,  
Down through the throat, the breast, and streamèd had  
E'en into sullen heart of those sick folk,  
Then, verily, all the fences of man's life  
Began to topple. From the mouth the breath  
Would roll a noisome stink, as stink to heaven  
Rotting cadavers flung unburied out.  
And, lo, thereafter, all the body's strength  
And every power of mind would languish, now  
In very doorway of destruction.  
And anxious anguish and ululation (mixed  
With many a groan) companionèd always  
The intolerable torments. Night and day,  
Recurrent spasms of vomiting would rack  
Always their thews and members, breaking down  
With sheer exhaustion men already spent.  
And yet on no one's body couldst thou mark  
The skin with o'er-much heat to burn aglow,  
But rather the body unto touch of hands  
Would offer a warmish feeling, and thereby  
Show red all over, with ulcers, so to say,  
Inbranded, like the " sacred fire " o'erspread  
Along the members. The inward parts of men,  
In truth, would blaze unto the very bones ;  
A flame, like flame in furnaces, would blaze  
Within the stomach. Nor couldst aught apply  
Unto their members light enough and thin  
For shift of aid,—but coolness and a breeze  
Ever and ever. Some would plunge those limbs

On fire with bane into the icy streams,  
Hurling the body naked into the waves ;  
Many would headlong fling them deeply down  
The water-pits, tumbling with eager mouth  
Already agape. The insatiable thirst  
That whelmed their parchèd <sup>1</sup> bodies, lo, would make  
A goodly shower seem like to scanty drops.  
Respite of torment was there none. Their frames  
Forspent lay prone. With silent lips of fear  
Would Medicine mumble low, the while she saw  
So many a time men roll their eyeballs round,  
Staring wide-open, unvisited of sleep,  
The heralds of old death. And in those months  
Was given many another sign of death :  
The intellect of mind by sorrow and dread  
Derangèd, the sad brow, the countenance  
Fierce and delirious, the tormented ears  
Beset with ringings, the breath quick and short  
Or huge and intermittent, soaking sweat  
A-glisten on neck, the spittle in fine gout  
Tainted with colour of crocus and so salt,  
The cough scarce wheezing through the rattling throat.  
Aye, and the sinews in the fingered hands  
Were sure to contract, and sure the jointed frame  
To shiver, and up from feet the cold to mount  
Inch after inch : and toward the súpreme hour  
At last the pinchèd nostrils, nose's tip  
A very point, eyes sunken, temples hollow,  
Skin cold and hard, the shuddering grimace,  
The pulled and puffy flesh above the brows !—  
O not long after would their frames lie prone  
In rigid death. And by about the eighth  
Resplendent light of sun, or at the most  
On the ninth flaming of his flambeau, they

<sup>1</sup> *Arida* of course goes syntactically with *sitis*.

Would render up the life. If any then  
Had 'scaped the doom of that destruction, yet  
Him there awaited in the after days  
A wasting and a death from ulcers vile  
And black discharges of the belly, or else  
Through the clogged nostrils would there ooze along  
Much foulèd blood, oft with an aching head :  
Hither would stream a man's whole strength and flesh.  
And whoso had survived that virulent flow  
Of the vile blood, yet into thews of him  
And into his joints and very genitals  
Would pass the old disease. And some there were,  
Dreading the doorways of destruction  
So much, lived on, deprived by the knife  
Of the male member ; not a few, though lopped  
Of hands and feet, would yet persist in life,  
And some there were who lost their eyeballs : O  
So fierce a fear of death had fallen on them !  
And some, besides, were by oblivion  
Of all things seized, that even themselves they knew  
No longer. And though corpse on corpse lay piled  
Unburied on ground, the race of birds and beasts  
Would or spring back, scurrying to escape  
The virulent stench, or, if they'd tasted there,  
Would languish in approaching death. But yet  
Hardly at all during those many suns  
Appeared a fowl, nor from the woods went forth  
The sullen generations of wild beasts—  
They languished with disease and died and died.  
In chief, the faithful dogs, in all the streets  
Outstretched, would yield their breath distressfully—  
For so that Influence of bane would twist  
Life from their members. Nor was found one sure  
And universal principle of cure :  
For what to one had given the power to take



The vital winds of air into his mouth,  
 And to gaze upward at the vaults of sky,  
 The same to others was their death and doom.

In those affairs, O awfulest of all,  
 O pitiable most was this, was this :  
 Whoso once saw himself in that disease  
 Entangled, ay, as damnèd unto death,  
 Would lie in wanhope, with a sullen heart,  
 Would, in fore-vision of his funeral,  
 Give up the ghost, O then and there. For, lo,  
 At no time did they cease one from another  
 To catch contagion of the greedy plague,—  
 As though but woolly flocks and hornèd herds ;  
 And this in chief would heap the dead on dead :  
 For who forbore to look to their own sick,  
 O these (too eager of life, of death afear'd)  
 Would then, soon after, slaughtering Neglect  
 Visit with vengeance of evil death and base—  
 Themselves deserted and forlorn of help.  
 But who had stayed at hand would perish there  
 By that contagion and the toil which then  
 A sense of honour and the pleading voice  
 Of weary watchers,<sup>1</sup> mixed with voice of wail  
 Of dying folk, forced them to undergo.  
 This kind of death each nobler soul would meet.  
 The funerals, uncompanièd, forsaken,  
 Like rivals contended to be hurried through.

. . . . .  
 And men contending to ensepulchre  
 Pile upon pile the throng of their own dead :  
 And weary with woe and weeping wandered home ;  
 And then the most would take to bed from grief.  
 Nor could be found not one, whom nor disease

<sup>1</sup> For this rendering of *lassorum*, cf. 'Thucydides' account, from which that of Lucretius is elaborated.

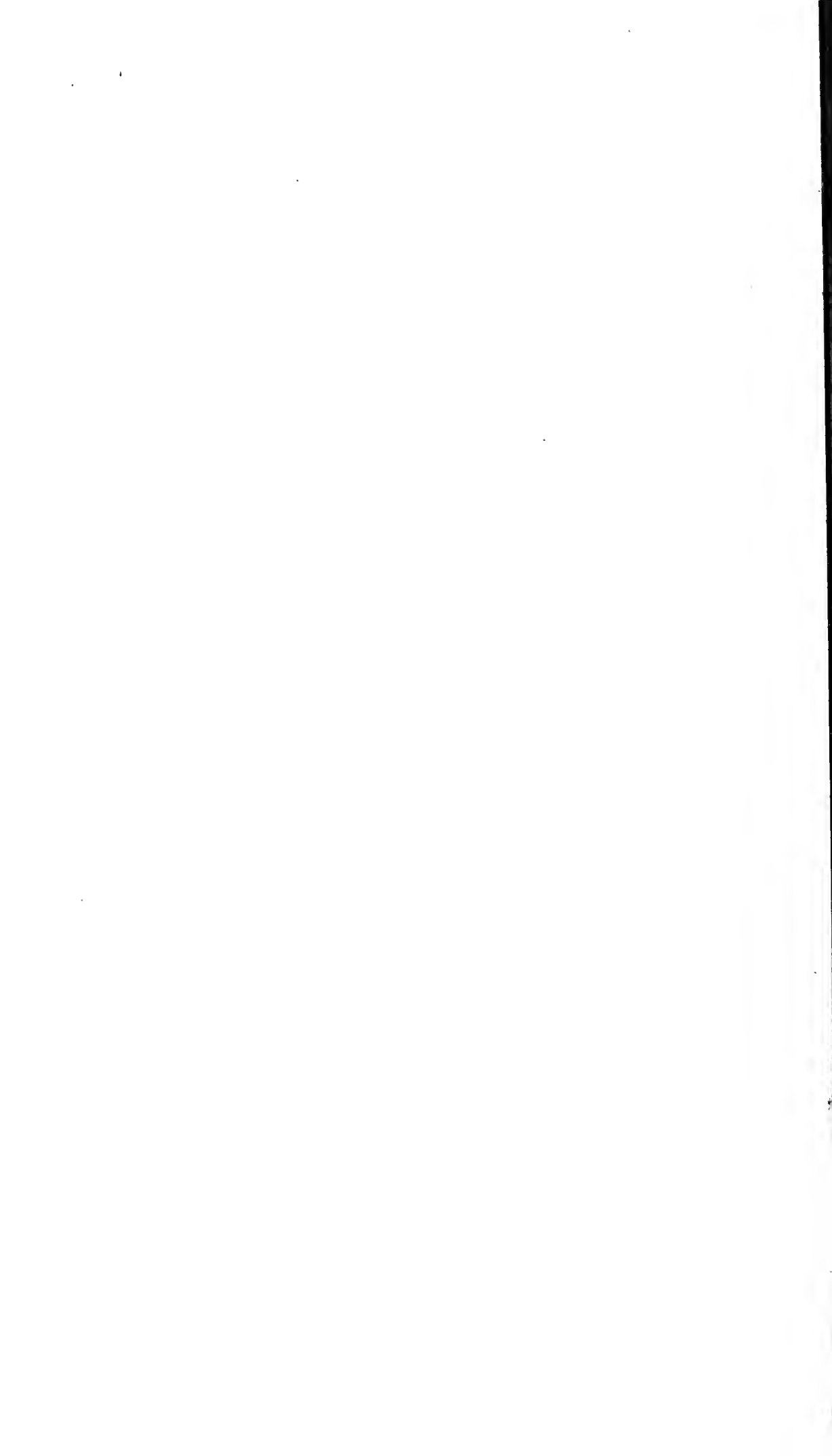
Nor death, nor woe had not in those dread times  
Attacked.

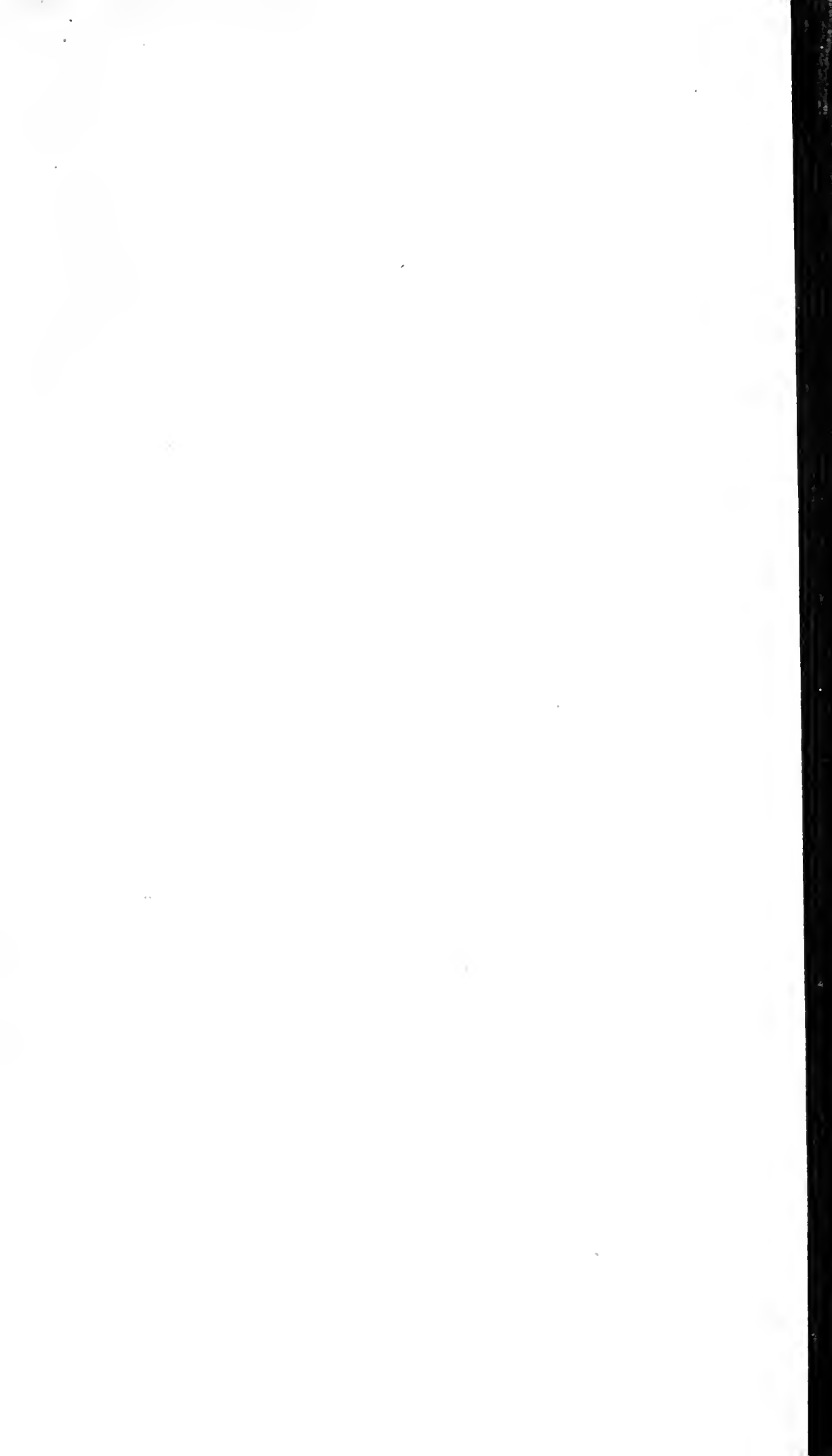
By now the shepherds and neatherds all,  
Yea, even the sturdy guiders of curved ploughs,  
Began to sicken, and their bodies would lie  
Huddled within back-corners of their huts,  
Delivered by squalor and disease to death.  
O often and often couldst thou then have seen  
On lifeless children lifeless parents prone,  
Or offspring on their fathers', mothers' corpse  
Yielding the life. And into the city poured  
O not in least part from the countryside  
That tribulation, which the peasantry  
Sick, sick, brought thither, thronging from every quarter,  
Plague-stricken mob. All places would they crowd,  
All buildings too ; whereby the more would death  
Up-pile a-heap the folk so crammed in town.  
Ah, many a body thirst had dragged and rolled  
Along the highways there was lying strewn  
Beside Silenus-headed water-fountains,—  
The life-breath choked from that too dear desire  
Of pleasant waters. Ah, everywhere along  
The open places of the populace,  
And along the highways, O thou mightest see  
Of many a half-dead body the sagged limbs,  
Rough with all squalor, wrapped around with rags,  
Perish from very nastiness, with naught  
But skin upon the bones, well-nigh already  
Buried—in ulcers vile and óbscene filth.  
All holy temples, too, of deities  
Had Death becrammèd with the carcasses ;  
And stood each fane of the Celestial Ones  
Laden with stark cadavers everywhere—  
Places which warders of the shrines had crowded  
With many a guest. For now no longer men

Did mightily esteem the old Divine,  
The worship of the gods : the woe at hand  
Did over-master. Nor in the city then  
Remained those rites of sepulture, with which  
That pious folk had evermore been wont  
To buried be. For it was wildered all  
In wild alarms, and each and every one  
With sullen sorrow would bury his own dead,  
As present shift allowed. And sudden stress  
And poverty to many an awful act  
Impelled ; and with a monstrous screaming they  
Would, on the frames of alien funeral pyres,  
Place their own kin, and thrust the torch beneath  
Oft brawling with much bloodshed round about  
Rather than quit dead bodies loved in life.









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