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THE

FIRST BOOK

OF

T. LUCRETIVS CARVS

OF THE

NATURE OF THINGS.

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE,

BY

The Rev. W. HAMILTON DRUMMOND.

EDINBURGH:

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1808.

TO

ROBERT ANDERSON, M. D.

THIS TRANSLATION

OF THE

FIRST BOOK OF LUCRETIUS,

IN TESTIMONY

OF

AFFECTION AND ESTEEM,

IS INSCRIBED,

BY

HIS SINCERE FRIEND,

THE TRANSLATOR.

T. LUCRETIUS CARUS

OF THE

NATURE OF THINGS,

&c.

To the Right Reverend
the Lord Bishop of Down
from the Translator

PREFACE.

THE first attempt to translate Lucretius into poetical numbers was made by Evelyn, who published the first book in 1656. Though he received an ample portion of praise from Waller and other contemporary writers, he relinquished the design of completing the whole, in despair of equalling the excellence of the original.

Creech translated the whole poem ; but though Creech was a scholar of very superior literary attainments, provided he gave the meaning of his author, in which he was not always successful, he shewed little solicitude for elegant and harmonious versification. He introduced, with unexampled li-

centiousness, long descriptions of his own, as that of luxury at the commencement of the first book, while he omitted whole sentences of the original. His translation has consequently been censured for the two opposite faults of deficiency and redundancy.

Dryden followed Creech, and of all our poets, if Pope be excepted, he was the best qualified for the task, by the ardour of his genius, and the flowing eloquence and variety of his numbers; though even he was often betrayed, by the rapidity of his composition, and the fertility of his invention, into the same faults as Creech. However, had he translated the whole of Lucretius, succeeding translations had been superfluous; but he tried his powers only on a few of the most brilliant passages.

A prose translation was published by Guernier in 1743; and in 1799 an anonymous author pub-

lished a poetical version of the first book. Neither this nor Evelyn's specimen has fallen under the inspection of the present writer.

A translation of the whole work, in blank verse, accompanied by Wakefield's Latin text, commentaries, and notes, was edited in 1805 by the very learned and ingenious Mr. Good.

Notwithstanding these repeated attempts, it seems to be the opinion of the public that there is still room for another version. If the learned, to whose decision the translator submits with becoming humility, shall think he has succeeded in this specimen, he proposes to translate and publish the remaining books, with an essay on the life and writings of Lucretius, and to illustrate the whole with critical and explanatory notes. If he meet a just condemnation, his labour is at an end. *Hic terminus hæret.*

Whatever may be the defects of the translation, the merit of the original will admit of no dispute. As a poet, Lucretius is justly entitled to the first place among the votaries of the Ausonian muse. His work presents us with the most curious monument of ancient philosophy. It abounds in profound argumentation, excellent moral reflections, and sublime descriptions—descriptions whose borrowed splendour has shone in the chaplet of many a poet, and whose beauty every man of taste must admire. Horace and Virgil, both of whom he surpassed in the grand characteristic of genius, invention, did not scorn to drink from the stream of his song. He excels in beauty and variety; but he is chiefly distinguished by a natural ease and simplicity, by a rapid flow and inexhaustible exuberance of arguments on his favourite topic, and by the constant exercise of a conscious superiority approaching dogmatism in combating the opinions of his antagonists. He praises, indeed, with candour, what-

ever he thinks commendable in their writings, as in the instances of Ennius and Empedocles, but shews no indulgence to any principle which he deems erroneous. When he stoops to notice their errors, he stoops like the eagle to pounce on his quarry. He unites the pride of the Roman to the versatility of the Greek, the profundity of the philosopher to the vivacity of the poet. Intrepid and enthusiastic in defence of Epicurus, he is carried along in the confidence of victory, and bears down all opposition by the irresistible power of genius. If sometimes the abstruseness of his philosophy render his diction prosaic or obscure, he soon clothes it in new light and beauty. His giant mind bursts the shackles in which he was fettered, and he comes forth like the votary of Apollo, breathing the inspiration of the god, or like the most favoured of the sons of fancy,

‘ Scattering from his pictured urn

Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.’

Did it fall within the plan of this publication, these observations might be extended, and the errors and absurdities of the Epicurean philosophy exposed. But on this topic the translator forbears to expatiate at present. He would only remind those, if such there be, who are disposed to cavil at a work of this nature, that all the ancient heathen poets support a system of mythology no less monstrous than the theology of Epicurus. Are Homer's opinions of the gods more elevated than those of Lucretius? The one degrades them beneath the worst of mankind, the other denies their agency. The opinions of both are equally absurd and equally harmless.

It remains for the translator to account for his preferring the couplet to blank verse. It is his opinion that blank verse never can succeed so well in any translation, unless we except Greek tragedy, and similar productions; for it requires a nervous

peculiarity of diction, a bold originality of thought, and a subject in itself sublime, to support its dignity; and without all these qualifications united, qualifications which, though they may eminently belong to an original work, are hardly to be expected in translation, in what is it superior to mere prose? It is neither so favourable to the spirit of an author, nor so agreeable to an English ear. This opinion is sanctioned by the example of Pope in his Homer; a work which has all the spirit of an original, and which is, for this reason alone, perhaps, the most excellent translation which the world ever saw.

*Mount Collyer, near Belfast,
June 1, 1808.*

T. LUCRETIVS CARVS

OF THE

NATURE OF THINGS.

BOOK FIRST.

Analysis.

INVOCATION to Venus.. The powerful influence of love.. The poet supplicates Venus to choose a season of tender endearment, and implore Mars to establish peace.. Dedicates his poem to Memmius.. explains the nature of his subject.. The gods live far remote from the concerns of mankind, and are neither gratified by their virtues, nor provoked by their crimes.. Image of Superstition.. Praises Epicurus.. Vindicates himself from the charge of impiety.. Illustrates the ills of superstition by a description of the sacrifice of Iphigenia; and asks Memmius, with an air of triumph, if he can any longer confide in the terrifying opinions of poets and philosophers.. Bestows praise on Ennius as a poet.. And considers the doctrine of a future state as a fiction unworthy of a philosophical mind.

The fundamental principle of the Epicurean philosophy is, that the gods themselves cannot create any thing from nothing.. Did things spring into being without the assistance of parent seeds, men might rise from the earth, and herds and flocks drop from the teeming clouds.. But the unvarying uniformity of nature in bringing things to birth and perfection at certain seasons, in affixing to each a determinate size and duration, in the support and propagation of animal existences, and in the melioration of fruit by culture, proves that all things originate from primordial seed.

As nothing sprung from nothing, nothing can be annihilated; for then all bodies, even the universe itself, might suddenly disappear, though subjected to no external violence.. But bodies remain entire till assailed by some exterior force, because they are compounded of indestructible atoms.. It may be objected, that some bodies, as rains falling on the ground, disappear and perish: but the fallacy of this conclusion is evinced by the sudden change produced by their influence on the face of creation, in the verdure of the trees, the increase of the fruits, the swelling udders of the flocks and herds, and the increased population of the towns and villages.. This topic is concluded by the declaration, that nothing in nature is renovated, unless by the destruction of some other body.

The existence of primordial atoms demonstrated.. Many bodies exist in nature, which, on account of their exility, are imperceptible to the keenest vision.. This fact illustrated in the description of a storm, which is composed of invisible particles of agitated matter.. Tangibility, or the power of affecting the senses, is the test of body; and on this principle heat, cold, sound, and odour, though not objects of sight, are corporeal.. This subject farther illustrated by a variety of instances.

The universe is not a crowded scene of material principles, for it contains a void.. The motion, permeability, and porosity of the most solid substances, and the different densities of bodies of equal bulk, are proofs of this position.. The motion of fish in water affords no reason for supposing that the whole might be a plenum, and yet bodies might move.. If two smooth planes be joined together, their sudden separation produces a void.. There are many other arguments to establish this hypothesis, but he

deems those already adduced sufficient, observing, that the discovery of one truth leads to that of another, till the mind arrive at the ultimate object of pursuit, as the scent leads the sagacious hound till he starts his prey in the last retreat.

Whatever may be supposed to exist distinct from body and void, is only a conjunct, accident, or event.. A conjunct is that property of body which cannot be separated from it without the destruction of the body in which it exists, as heat in fire, and moisture in water.. An event is an accidental property, whose presence or absence produces no change on its subject, as concord, war, poverty, and wealth.

The first principles of things are firm solids, which can neither be penetrated nor destroyed, eternal, indissoluble, incapable of the smallest diminution, and the constant supply of matter, with which nature renovates her plans.. The permeability of bodies no objection to this doctrine.. The unvarying constancy of nature in bringing her productions to maturity at a certain time, the marked distinction of the different species of animals, and the uniform similarity of figure, habits, and mode of life, in individuals of the same species, evince the indissoluble and immutable nature of the primordial seeds from which they originate.. Solids, though considered as simple bodies, are composed of extreme points, whose existence is proved by the simple argument, that if there are not extreme points into which bodies may be divided, and where divisibility ceases, there would be no difference between bodies of the most various magnitude.

Heraclitus and some other ancient philosophers had maintained that fire was the origin of the universe.. He censures that sage for

the obscurity of his style, reasons against his hypothesis, declaring, that neither the rarefaction nor the condensation of that element could produce water.. Nor can it be condensed or rarefied without a void, which the supporters of the system deny.. Certain corpuscles of the same immutable nature constitute the whole, and form fire, as well as every other substance.. No single element more than fire can compose the whole of nature.

He combats the theory of Empedocles, who had maintained, that the combination of the four elements might produce the universe.. If the elements retain their own proper nature in the compounds which they form, they would produce only rude masses of matter; but if they undergo a general transmutation, they must at last return to nothing; for the total change of body is its destruction.. As the elements of language, though few in number, compose an infinite variety of words, so do the elements, or first principles of matter, by their various arrangement, produce all the varieties of things.

The philosophy of Anaxagoras erroneous.. That philosopher had declared, that things spring not from common seeds, but from things similar to themselves, and that the earth is nothing but an agglomeration of smaller earths.. Such first principles, he contends, being possessed of a nature similar to the aggregates which they form, are soft, subject to utter dissolution, and consequently totally unfit for forming the universe.. The arguments on this topic concluded by shewing the ridiculous conclusion which must be drawn from it; for as men are subject to the mournful and risible affections, the principles from which they originate may sometimes be seen to laugh or weep.

The immensity of the universe . . . Nothing can have any limits, unless there be a place beyond it from which its limits may be seen . . . This is not the case with the universe, therefore it is illimitable . . . Were it confined within bounds, all matter would flow into the lowest region by its own gravity; and as nothing could be produced without motion, there would be no stars, sun, nor any thing under the cope of heaven . . . Body and void alternately bound each other, and form the universe . . . But if one of them only be supposed to be immense, for instance void, nothing could exist for a single hour, but all would be broken, destroyed, and dispersed through infinite space . . . Or rather they never would have been created at all; for it was by no council or prescience of their own that primordial seeds combined, but being tossed about for infinite ages, and thrown into every possible shape, they chanced at length to coalesce, and form the world.

It had been asserted by the Peripatetics and Stoics, that all things tend to a certain centre, and that animals walk on the opposite side of the earth with their feet to ours . . . He contends against the supposed absurdity of this opinion . . . What is infinite can have no beginning, middle, nor end . . . Inconsistency of their hypothesis . . . Notwithstanding their assumed principle of gravitation, they absurdly suppose that the solid heavens surround and confine the whole, lest all things, as he most sublimely describes, should rise, and fly scattered through the regions of space, the earth sink beneath our feet, heaven fall in ruin around us, and the whole universe be dissolved . . . Memmius is encouraged to a farther investigation of nature, by the assurance that one truth leads to another, till the universal plan be gradually unfolded.

T. LUCRETIUS CARUS

OF THE

NATURE OF THINGS.

BOOK THE FIRST.

PARENT of Rome, propitious queen of love,
Delight of men below, and gods above ;
Who pour'st abroad thy life-diffusing soul
To all that lies beneath the whirling pole ;
The buoyant ocean owns thy genial powers, 5
And earth enriched with fruits, and decked with flowers ;
From thy fond smile the living tribes arise,
And view, rejoiced, the orb that gilds the skies.
Goddess divine ! before thy radiant form
Flit the chill vapour, and the wintry storm ; 10

For thee the Earth her fragrant breast perfumes,
Unfolds her flowers, and opens all their blooms ;
Relenting Ocean, by thy potent wiles,
Smooths his rough brow, and clothes his face in smiles ;
While all the Heavens, suffused with clearer light, 15
In placid glory shine serenely bright.

When first unlocked from Winter's tyrant sway
Love-breathing zephyrs hail the vernal day,
Th' aerial tenants of the woods and groves
Mark thy approach, and chant their little loves ; 20
Their hearts deep wounded by the subtle fire,
They pant, they burn, they tremble with desire.
Then savage beasts the pleasing transport feel,
And round their mates in sportive gambols wheel ;
Or, while the maddening fury fires their blood, 25
Scour the wide plain, and stem the rapid flood.

Lured by thy joys, obedient to thy sway,
All nature follows where thou leadst the way.
Thy potent influence seas and skies pervades,
Plains, torrents, mountains, and the woodland shades ;
Till every creature feel the gentle flame 31
Shoot thro' his breast, and quiver o'er his frame :
Each to his mate with fondest rapture flies,
And hence their various tribes successive rise.

Since thou alone, o'er all this wond'rous scene, 35
Art hail'd by Nature universal queen,
Since nought that charms or gladdens mortal sight,
Unblest by thee, beholds the bourne of light,
O ! aid my soul thy beauty to infuse
Thro' all my song, and thou befriend the muse. 40
What laws, what nature rules the frame of things,
With bold attempt my muse for Memmius sings ;

Memmius ! the boast and glory of our race,
Adorned by thee with every lasting grace :
For him, then, goddess ! as the numbers flow, 45
With thy immortal beauty bid them glow ;
Do thou the while bid War's dire labours cease,
And lull the earth and seas in tranquil peace ;
For thou alone with peace canst man delight,
Thou only soothe the dreadful god of fight. 50
Oft the fierce power, by mighty love opprest,
Love's wound eternal bleeding in his breast,
Hung on thy bosom, round thee fondly twined,
And close by thine his taper neck reclined,
Supinely laid, and panting in thine arms, 55
Feeds his wild eyes, insatiate on thy charms,
Till all his spirit, thrilled with sweet desire,
Hangs on thy lips that glow with mutual fire :

Now, gentle goddess ! now thy influence prove,
Seize the soft moment of dissolving love, 60
Pour in his ear thy soul-subduing voice,
Implore for peace, and bid thy Rome rejoice.

For while dire war and civil discord reign,
With anxious heart I meditate the strain ;
Nor can my Memmius to my song repair, 65
While trembling Rome demands his guardian care :
Yet, O ! what moments from such cares are free,
To Science grant, my Memmius, and to me ;
The well-culled gifts of faithful friendship prize,
Nor, ere their worth be understood, despise. 70
No vulgar theme employs my studious hours,
I sing of heaven, and heaven's eternal powers ;
How suns and planets, and the spacious earth,
With all this mighty system, sprung to birth.

Whence powerful nature to existence brings, 75
Sustains, supports, combines, arranges things ;
And how again, as fatal time revolves,
She spoils their concord, and their frame dissolves ;
Back to their native matter bids them speed,
To simple atoms, elements, or seed ; 80
For such the names the sciences impose,
And such the principles whence all things rose.

For all the tenants of the blest abodes
Are self-existent, self-dependent gods ;
Far, far remote from man and man's affairs, 85
Free from all pain, from dangers, and from cares,
Blest in themselves, their ages they employ
In love, in concord, in immortal joy ;
No want they feel, no good they praise below,
Nor at our crimes with indignation glow. 90

Long human life lay groveling on the ground,
In galling chains of Superstition bound,
That horrid monster, whose terrific head
Lowered from the heavens, and shook the world with
dread,

Till one bold Greek dared all her rage defy, 95

And marked her visage with undaunted eye;

That noble Greek, whose truth-illumin'd soul

Not all the powers of heaven could e'er controul,

Nor threat'ning bolts loud volleying from above,

Nor all the thunders of our fabled Jove: 100

They only roused his ardent spirit more,

To burst those bounds that ne'er were burst before,

Nature's close bulwarks;—with superior sway

His soul in triumph forced resistless way

Beyond the limits of the mundane frame, 105

That rise impaled in ever-during flame.

He soon explored the vast unbounded plan,
Shewed whence and how this beauteous scene began ;
To what creation's plastic powers extend,
Their range, their limits, origin and end— 110
Crushed in her turn fell Superstition lies
Beneath our feet inglorious, ne'er to rise—
The daring triumph to the blest abodes
Exalts us mortals equal to the gods.

Fear not lest Error pour a guilty lay, 115
Or impious Science lead the soul astray ;
But hear, O hear, to what atrocious deeds
The direful power of Superstition leads.
Let Aulis tell how, shackled in her chain,
The best, the bravest of the Grecian train, 120
At Dian's fane with Iphigenia stood,
And the pure shrine defiled with purer blood.

Her virgin locks a holy band enrolled,
And veiled her cheeks beneath its ample fold :
Before her weeping friends, the altar nigh, 125
Stood her sad sire, nor raised his streaming eye ;
While the fierce priests, tho' eager for her life,
His woe respected, and concealed the knife :
On knee submissive sunk the virgin low
In speechless grief and mute-imploing woe ; 130
But vain were tears, and vain a daughter's name,
Her royal lineage, and a first-born's claim ;
For to the altar, trembling and dismayed,
By cruel hands was dragged the spotless maid.
O how unlike the gay elated bride, 135
Led from the fane in Hymen's festive pride !
She, ripe for bridal joys, in all her bloom,
Meets from her priest-led sire an early doom,

And falls, the purchase of the vagrant breeze,
To waft his navy o'er the Phrygian seas. 140
Such foul submission Superstition craves,
Such the fell deeds to which she drives her slaves.

And dost thou still the idle tales regard
Of lying priest and terror-breathing bard?
What num'rous dreams could my invention form 145
To wrap thy reason in perpetual storm,
To rouse thy fears and passions into strife,
And one sad scene of discord render life?
And justly too—but if to human woes
Death only bring an undisturbed repose, 150
By any power that reason calls her own
See priest and bard with all their threats o'erthrown:
But all the boasted powers of mind are vain,
Long as in death we dread eternal pain.

For yet in 'vain would human wisdom scan 155
The mystic nature of the soul of man,
Whether infused within th' enascent frame,
Or with the body equal birth she claim,
In friendly union and mysterious tie,
To live together, and together die ; 160
Or darkling roam a pale and wandering ghost
Thro' the vast caverns of th' infernal coast ;
Or, if she joy in transmigration strange,
By power divine in bestial forms to range ;
As Ennius sung, who twined the muse's bough 165
Of leaf perennial round Ausonia's brow,
First of our bards, with fame resplendent crowned,
And thro' the Latian states afar renowned—
And yet he sung, in never-dying strains,
Of night's dark realms and Acherusian fanes, 170

Where nor our bodies nor our souls can glide,
But shades alone of wond'rous paleness bide ;
Whence to his fancy Homer's spectre rose,
Immortal bard !—th' effusion of his woes
Down his pale cheek a briny torrent ran, 175
Rapt as he sung the universal plan.

All such vain fictions let my muse dispel,
And, taught by reason's soundest precepts, tell
Whence the round moon and solar orb arise,
Their paths thro' heaven, the wonders of the skies,
And earth's prolific powers ; nor these alone, 181
But, when true Science makes the secret known,
Unfold what subtle essences refined
Compose the active soul and thinking mind,
And whence strange fancy, with her gloomy train,
Sports in the sickening heart and sleepless brain, 186

And in terrific dreams, before the sight,
Starts the pale ghosts and visions of the night ;
And though the earth embrace their mouldering bones,
Still bids us see their forms, and hear their moans.

Hard is the task upon a theme so new, 191

So poor our knowledge, and our words so few,
By Greece's art to form the Latian lay,
O'er her dark truths to pour resplendent day,
Bid her harsh terms mellifluous roll along, 195
And clothe her Science in the pomp of song.

Yet the bold theme with ardour will I prove,
Roused by your praise, and cherished by your love ;
The balm of friendship makes each labour light,
The day's long study, and the sleepless night. 200

Sweet is the toil as fondly I combine
Appropriate strains, and form the glowing line,

To dissipate the gloom round nature spread,
 And o'er thy soul the light of Science shed.

But those dark terrors which the mind enshroud,
 That baleful gloom, that intellectual cloud, 206
 Yields to no beam or lucid shaft of day,
 But flies dispersed by reason's brighter ray.

Know this grand truth, the base of nature's law,
 NOUGHT CAN THE GODS THEMSELVES FROM NOTHING
 DRAW. 210

When lurid meteors fire the troubled air,
 When thunders bellow, and blue lightnings glare,
 Fear-struck, and strangers to the grand design,
 Weak men ascribe them to a power divine:
 But this great truth illumcs the erring mind, 215
 Her gloomiest terrors scatters to the wind,

And shews how heaven and earth are spread abroad
Uncalled, unaided by the power of God.

Grant that the world from nothing first arose,
Nothing would still new worlds on worlds disclose ;
From one diffusive source might things proceed, 221
Without appropriate germs or parent seed.
Then men would rise from ocean's depth profound,
And finned and feathered nations spurn the ground ;
Rich flocks and herds the teeming tempest rain, 225
And beasts of dubious birth possess the plain ;
From parent stems no fruits peculiar grow,
But every fruit on every tree would glow.
If genial seeds, by fixed respective laws,
Produce not all things—whence their parent cause ?
But since each creature, from its proper source, 231
Shoots into life, and gathers all its force,

Th' organic seeds in one fine compound ties,
 And bids its likeness from itself arise.
 From one productive cause, or parent race, 235
 Wild were the thought the growth of all to trace;
 For powers peculiar to itself we find
 In every race to propagate its kind.

Say, whence does Spring the roseate fields adorn;
 Or Summer's gold enrich the bearded corn; 240
 Whence Autumn bid the ripening vineyard glow,
 And copious streams of racy nectar flow;
 Unless creative nature all things breed
 From the nice union of their parent seed,
 While genial seasons roll, and vivid Earth 245
 Ferments, conceives, and bids them spring to birth?
 If nought produced them, all would quick appear
 'Midst every season of th' uncertain year,

Nor seeds primordial feel th' unfriendly power,
Of adverse climes retard their genial hour.

If all from nought increase, no destined time
Would each demand to reach its joyous prime, 250
But babes at once the strength of man assume,
And sudden foliage o'er the desert bloom.
Fact proves the error, for we over view
All creatures of their kind, in order due,
Spring by degrees, and by increasing shew 255
Th' appropriate seed and matter whence they grow.

Earth yields nor joy-inspiring fruits nor flowers,
Till warmed by spring, and fertilized by showers ;
Nor can the living tribes, deprived of food,
Or cherish life, or raise the sprightly brood. 260

Whence reason bids us in the truth confide,
That common seeds are scattered far and wide,
That atoms things, as letters words compose,
And not that all from nothing first arose.

Say, why has nature power to man denied, 265
With giant limbs to ford the swelling tide,
To rend the loftiest mountains in his rage,
And live in triumph o'er the wrecks of age ;
Whence but that matter, in proportion due,
Supplies the principles whence all things grew ? 270
Then must you grant that nought from nought arose,
But parent seeds both men and things compose,
And active germs, as nature's power decrees,
Shoot to the light, and freshen in the breeze.

'Tis plain, since culture fructifies the soil, 275
And fruits grow sweeter from the hand of toil,
In earth the germs of vegetation lay,
Till the keen ploughshare turned them to the day,
Rending the glebe—If no such germs abound,
Spontaneous fruit more sweet would heap the ground.

Besides, when bodies change their pristine states,
Nature dissolves, but not annihilates.
Did aught quite perish, soon would dire decay
Seize the vast world, and sweep it from the day,
Tho' no exterior force the frame assailed, 285
And o'er the union of its ties prevailed.
But since from nothing nought to being rose,
Eternal seeds the mighty whole compose.
Nought e'er can perish till external force
Assail and injure, or with silent course 290

Thro' the fine pores fell dissolution wind,
Corrode its texture, and its frame unbind.

Again, did time first principles consume,
And whelm all matter in eternal doom,
Could love creative prove? or bounteous earth 295
Support the tribes which Venus calls to birth?
Or streams perennial seek the deep from far?
Or subtle ether feed the rolling star?
Then would the wasting power of endless age
Have all things mortal swallow'd in its rage. 300
But if the seeds which renovate the plan
In nature's bosom lay since time began,
They live immortal, age and time defy,
And ne'er return to nought, consume, or die.

Suppose no bodies deathless seeds contain, 305
Bound by a stronger or a weaker chain,
One common force, yes, one small touch would blight,
And whelm the whole in everlasting night.
But since the principles whence bodies rise
Eternal are, and bound by various ties, 310
Things stand uninjured till some force resolve
Their firm cohesion, and those ties dissolve.
Hence nought to nought returns ; the broken frame
Sinks to its native atoms whence it came.

When father Æther pours his stores from high, 315
Absorbed by earth, they seem to fade and die ;
But, lo ! how soon their genial power is seen,
Springs the dense grass, and earth is clothed in green ;
The leafy verdure of the forest shoots,
And ripening orchards hang their glossy fruits ; 320

Hence men and brutes arise in vigour strong,
Hence blooming youths the joyous city throng,
And groves repeat the feathered warblers' song ;
Hence battening herds enjoy their grassy food,
And their full udders pour the milky flood. 325

With rapture filled, their progeny around
Try their weak limbs in many a frolic bound,
And as the dulcet stream distends their veins,
In life's gay morning gambol o'er the plains.
Thus nature bids th' immortal seeds revive, 330
Life spring from death, and new creations thrive.

Since thus the Muse has sung, in arduous strain,
Nought springs from nought, nor sinks to nought again,
Lest thou, distrustful, deem the strain untrue,
Because primordial seeds elude the view, 335

Hear the clear proof, and then with me unite
To own that seeds exist, yet shun the sight.
Mark how the whirlwind, with resistless sweep,
Drives the black clouds, and rolls the foamy deep,
Thro' shattered fleets and prostrate forests roars, 340
And shakes the mountains and the caverned shores.
Unseen, yet felt, thus many a viewless form
Rides in the air, and swells the rapid storm,
That scours heaven, earth, and seas, and far and near
Carries fell havoc in its dread career. 345
Onward it rolls impetuous as the flow
Of furious torrents swoln with melting snow,
Or spouting cataracts of sudden rain,
Down the steep mountain foaming to the plain :
Thro' cliffs and valleys roars th' increasing flood, 350
Tears the close shrubs, uproots the stubborn wood,

Rolls ponderous rocks with unresisted sway,
Bursts the strong arches, sweeps the bridge away
With thundering crash, and o'er each yielding mound
Spreads a wide, deep, and savage waste around. 355
Thus wild thro' heaven the whirlwind roars along
Its way so rapid, and its rage so strong ;
Where'er it turns its blind infuriate course,
It sweeps the world with swift unbridled force,
Trees, rocks, and hills uptears, and bids them fly 360
In many a whirling vortex thro' the sky.
Hence countless atoms which elude the sight,
To form the winds their latent powers unite ;
With mighty torrents equal force they claim,
Their strength, their fury, and their laws the same. 365

Again, when odours on the senses steal,
Their forms we see not, yet their influence feel :

No shape in sound th' acutest eye beholds,
In burning heat, or winter's keenest colds ;
But heat, cold, sound, and fragrance from the flower,
Affect the sense by some corporeal power ; 371
For true corporeal essences alone
By power to feel and to be felt are known.

The fleecy vestment on the wave-worn shore
The dewy moisture drinks at every pore ; 375
But, in the splendour of the solar light,
On secret wing the vapour speeds its flight ;
Yet vainly man's most rapid vision tries
To mark its progress in descent or rise,
Tho' wide diffused, as truth and sense declare, 380
In viewless particles thro' earth and air.

As suns revolve their annual rounds, behold
How from the finger wears the clasping gold ;
Perpetual drops the rock's strong fabric tear,
And gradual friction wastes the steely share ; 385
Continued steps the marble pavement grind ;
The brazen gods at Rome's tall portals find
Their right hands lessening as their votaries pass,
And kiss or touch th' attenuated brass.
Thus age and slow attrition bodies seize, 390
Corrode their form, and lessen by degrees,
Tho' envious Nature from the visual ray
Conceal the mode of ruin and decay.

Tho' time and nature, by gradation slow,
Make bodies lessen as they make them grow, 395
In vain would vision's piercing glance descry
By what substracted parts they fade and die ;

How rocks are caverned by the salt sea's rage,
And all things feel the wasting power of age.
Whence we must own that Nature, potent queen, 400
Rules the wide world by energies unseen.

But think not matter crowds her whole domain,
An incorporeal void her realms contain ;
A splendid truth, to guide the erring soul,
Dispel thy doubts, and ope the mighty whole ! 405
A void is vacant space which touch defies,
And in this void the source of motion lies.
For were it not—as bodies are possest
Of power inert, for ever must they rest,
And each to each a fixcd resistance prove ; 410
Then whence were motion, if no space to move ?
If doomed no impulse e'er to obey,
Fixed were the whole, and wedged in close array.

But, lo ! the heavens revolve around the pole,
Earth, air, and seas, in various movements roll. 415
But had not Nature formed a wide inane,
Silent and sad had stretched her dull domain ;
No life had bloomed, no creature raised its head,
But crowded matter lain unformed and dead.

Tho' firm cohesion solid bodies bind, 420
Thro' their close texture pores unnumbered wind ;
Thro' pendent caves the oozing dew distils,
And weeping rocks support the copious rills ;
Thro' many a channel glides the healthful food ;
Nutritious juices feed the spreading wood, 425
Absorbed from earth, thro' trunk, branch, leaf, they
shoot,
Glow in the blossom, ripen in the fruit ;

Thro' doors and walls the thrilling voice resounds,
And rigid cold the trembling bones astounds.
But no such wonders e'er had sense employed, 430
Had Nature formed not many a secret void.

Suppose two bodies in an equal scale,
Their size the same, and why shall one prevail?
In equal bulk if equal matter blend,
The wool should rapid as the lead descend. 435
Resisting force and sluggish weight we find
With matter still, but ne'er with void combined.
Hence, in two bodies of an equal size,
More num'rous pores the lighter must comprise;
Whence reason proves that many a vacuum lurks, 440
Tho' not perceived, in Nature's densest works.

O! let not error here thy soul mislead,
Nor the vain fiction of th' objector heed,
That the finned nations of the crystal tide,
Clad in bright scales, the liquid realm divide, 445
Because the water, as its waves they cleave,
Hastes closing swift to fill the space they leave.
Such subtle arguments would vainly prove,
Were all a plenum, bodies still might move;
† For how could motion urge the finny race, 450
Did yielding water own no vacant space?
Or how the water easy passage yield,
If fishes moved not in a porous field?
Hence we must things of motive power deprive,
Or grant a void, whence motion they derive. 455

Suppose two planes, in union close combined,
By force repulsive rapidly disjoined,

The sudden influx of the circling air
The new-formed vacuum rushes to repair ;
But grant that with the lightning's speed it glide, 460
Not in an instant is the void supplied ;
The nearer spaces first it hastes to seize,
Then fills the vacuum up by due degrees.

Widely he errs who thinks the air, condensed
(When first the union of the planes commenced) 465
Among the pores, by quick expansive start,
Bids the smooth surfaces asunder part.
For let us grant such condensation true,
It fills a prior void, and forms anew.
But if I ween aright, th' aerial tide 470
Nor knows contraction nor expansion wide
In mode like that opined : 'tis plain to sense,
Did void exist not, air could ne'er condense :

Hence, spite of error, and her reasonings vain,
Truth must compel to grant me an inane. 475

Full many a potent reason crowds my mind
In all the Muse has sung thy faith to bind ;
But these may serve to guide thy sapient youth
To other wonders in the realms of truth.
As hounds sagacious hunt the timid hare, 480
And snuff her footsteps in the tainted air,
Her winding course with growing speed pursue,
Till from her heathy den she springs to view ;
Thus urged by ardour for the mental chase,
From one truth known another mayst thou trace, 485
Till wide around thee bursts the blaze of light,
And nature starts unveiled upon thy sight.

But lest thy wandering footsteps idly stray,
Or cold distrust retard thy onward way,
O Memmius ! trust me that my tuneful muse 490
Quaffed from the parent fount such streams profuse,
And now could pour them from her copious breast,
That tardy age would all my powers arrest,
And burst life's barriers, ere the stream of song,
Rich with her cogent proofs and reasons strong, 495
With rapid eflux on th' attentive ear
Poured of one truth the illustration clear.

But to resume—two principles combine,
And only two, to form the whole design,
Matter and void : in void all bodies move : 500
That matter is, our common senses prove ;
Sense which the strong and firm foundation lays
Of every structure truth and science raise.

Without its aid in vain were reason's lore
The things unseen in nature to explore ; 505
And, as I sung, her powers would vainly trace,
Did void exist not, body's motiye place.

Besides, no principle can reason find
Alike from body and from void disjoined,
Some common third in nature's plan combined. 510
Whatever fixed and certain bounds comprise
Of great or most attenuated size,
Must rank with body, if by touch made known ;
But if its subtle nature touch disown,
Yielding a clear and unresisting place 515
To things in motion, 'tis a vacant space.

Whate'er exists in nature's ample fields,
Or gives an impulse, and to impulse yields,

Acting and suffering ; or the space supplies
Where bodies act, and motions first arise. 520
To act and feel by body are enjoyed,
But room for motion is the right of void ;
And no third principle the sense perceives,
Nor glowing fancy's liveliest power conceives.
What fancy feigns beside, or reason sees, 525
The CONJUNCT is or ACCIDENT of these.

That we name Conjunct which so closely clings
In friendly union to corporeal things ;
Their substance undestroyed, nor force nor art
Its league can sever, nor its ties dispart. 530
Thus weight in rocks and heat in fire is such,
Moisture in water, and in bodies touch,
Intangible in void : but sickness, health,
Freedom and slav'ry, poverty and wealth,

Peace, war, and all such properties beside, 535
Which may or may not be to things allied,
Yet leave their nature changeless and the same,
As non-essential, Accidents we name.

Sure time is nothing but th' ideal train
Of facts connected by the busy brain, 540
As present, past, and future ; nor of time
Pure and abstracted can the soul sublime
Form an idea, or the thought divest
Of things conjoined with motion or with rest.

Beware lest sophists all their arts employ, 545
When the bard sings the fall of heaven-built Troy,
And Helen's rape, to bid thy tongue confess
Such acts existence in themselves possess.

The lapse of time's irrevocable day
Of all those deeds the actors swept away. 550
Thus every act in time's eternal race
Is th' accident of person or of place.

Did space and matter no existence know,
Space in which deeds are done,* and creatures grow,
Ne'er had the beauty of the Spartan dame 555
Roused in the Trojan's breast love's slumbering flame,
Which filled the world with terror and alarms,
And clothed the sons of Greece in vengeful arms ;
Nor had the oak-ribbed steed's capacious womb
Teemed with a host to seal the Trojan doom 560
At dead of night ; and hence let reason own
That acts subsist not by themselves alone

* *Spatium, res in quo quæque geruntur, or gignuntur, according to Lambinus.*

Like void or body ; each th' event * we call
Of matter, and of space the scene of all.

From simple principles all body springs, 565
Or from a junction of the seeds of things.
No human force these seeds can e'er annoy,
Unbind their solid texture, or destroy ;
Altho' no easy task, with you I ween,
To find aught solid in the boundless scene ; 570
For nimble lightnings pierce the stony mound,
And densest walls are thrilled by voice or sound ;
In torturing flame the steel candescent glows,
And bursting rocks elastic vapour throws ;
Fierce fires dissolve stiff brass of icy mould, 575
And roll in liquid streams the glittering gold.

* Event, i. e. accident or attribute.

When the hand grasps the goblet's silver side,
As from above descends the racy tide,
The mingled heat or cold it quickly feels,
As thro' the vessel's porous side it steals. 590

Whence nought seems solid—yet my daring song—
O lend your ear—shall prove by reason strong,
That nature's works in firm cohesion hold
Bodies of solid and eternal mould,
Which atoms, seeds, or principles, we name, 585
Whence rose the world and all this beauteous frame.

And first, since nature holds her equal reign
O'er the two realms of body and inane,
Distinct and differing wide—where void extends,
No form corporeal there its being blends. 590
Where body is, no vacuous space intrudes,
For the close texture every void excludes ;

Whence we must own that solids are employed
In nature's plan distinct and free from void.

As void in every concrete form abounds, 595
Some solid substance still that void surrounds ;
Nor can the quickest glance of reason's eye
A void in aught of nature's works espy,
Unless we grant some solid's strong embrace
Encompass and inclose the vacant space ; 600
But that which holds a void from matter springs,
And forms a concrete of the seeds of things ;
Whence, while all bodies moulder to decay,
The solid seeds endure thro' time's eternal day.

Again, did nature no pure void contain, 605
All would be solid in her wide domain ;

And did not atoms fill the destined place
In which they rest, the whole were empty space ;
Whence void and body in alternate rounds
One forms not all, exist in nature's bounds, 610
Each free from each ; and seeds, we hence decide,
Must from a plenum vacant space divide.

No human force these seeds can e'er dispart,
Nor chymic lore, nor philosophic art ;
Their solid texture and their firm array 615
Spurn at all power, and triumph o'er decay ;
For nought in nature e'er can be destroyed,
Or cleft or broken, if deprived of void :
Nor moisture, searching flame, nor thrilling cold,
Which all destroy, pierce body's poreless mould : 620
The more of empty space their pores conceal,
Those potent solvents rage things sooner feel ;

But voidless solids ever sound endure,
From dissolution, time, and change secure.

Did matter not eternal being boast, 625
The world long since had sunk in nothing lost ;
And all the various scenes that charm the sight,
Had sprung from nought again to hail the light ;
But, as before, my daring muse has sung,
Nought sinks to nought, as nought from nought has
sprung ; 630
Immortal seeds, in each corporeal frame,
Live thro' all time unchanging and the same :
When bodies perish still these seeds remain
The drooping world to renovate again ;
Seeds solid, deathless which alone supply 635
The waste of nature when her products die.

Had nature raised no fixed impervious mound,
Fell dissolution's fatal power to bound,
All had so perished that we ne'er could scan,
A reproduction of the glorious plan, 640
Nor from th' abraded seeds, in certain time
See aught created reach it's joyous prime ;
For dissolution would more quick pursue
Than nature's care her wasting forms renew,
And therefore all that time's destroying rage 645
Has broken and dissolved from endless age
To pristine beauty she could ne'er restore
Dissolv'd and broken to revive no more.
But since we see thro' ocean, earth, and air,
Her plastic hand, her injured works repair, 650
Raise kinds from kinds, and in its destined hour,
Bid each expanding reach its age's flower,
'Tis plain she limits dissolution's power.

Tho' seeds be solid, yet their compound mass
May still be soft, as water, earth, and gas ; 655
Because their fine interstices retain,
Spread thro' the concrete, many a small inane
But were the seeds of soft, or yielding frame
Say whence dense flint, or denser iron came ?
At once th' absurd conjecture hastes to raze 660
The first firm principles which nature lays :
Thus reason proves that solid seeds combine
Simple and pure to form the whole design,
Which, as more close their condensations grow
On all their concretes greater strength bestow. 665

Since certain destined limits are assigned
For growth and life to each respective kind,
And nature has th' eternal laws decreed
Its powers and limits to each various breed

So strictly just, suspicion ne'er can trace 670
Change, or confusion in a single race ;
But e'en her plumage, and her speckled hue,
Shew from what nest the feathered songster flew ;
Sure we must grant corporeal things proceed
From some peculiar and unchanging seed : 675
But grant that time all seeds might disarrange,
And each with each its primal order change
Vain were the task amid the endless strife
To guess what might or might not spring to life ;
What sphere and limit are to each assigned ; 680
Or mid the living tribes of varying kind,
The proper motion, form, and insinct trace
Which mark the parent and respective race.

Again, all bodies certain points comprize
Whose subtle shape no vision e'er descries : 689

No parts unite to form their slender frame
And hence of points they gain th' appropriate name,
No being sep'rate from their concrete whole,
Nor was, nor shall be theirs while ages roll :
But with all bodies closely joined they blend, 690
And form at once their origin and end,
With parts on parts in bonds so firmly tied
No human force can sever or divide.
Whence seeds are simple, solid, and combined
Of points in closest condensation joined, 695
From pure simplicity their influence springs,
And not from union of discordant things :
And kept the waste of nature to repair
No time can injure, and no force impair.

Suppose no point extreme the smallest grain
Infinity of parts must still contain ; 700

Within each part, if lesser parts reside,
Which yet in parts more subtle may divide
Can thought determine where the difference lies
Between the greatest and the smallest size? 705
A grain to infinite we might explore
Nor earth itself could be divided more
But reason spurns the thought, and bids confess
That points exist which never can be less,
Solid, eternal, which no force nor art 710
Nor wasting age can lessen and dispart.

Did nature from whose bosom things evolve
Ne'er into points their various forms dissolve;
Vain were her art, and vain her plastic care
Aught of her mouldering ruins to repair : 715
For vain were compounds, as they ne'er comprize
Due motion, weight, connection, force and size,

Th' essential properties whence all began,
Or to repair, or renovate the plan.

Were dissolution's solvent power confined 720
By no fixed limits, still the reas'ning mind
Must grant that atoms stood from endless age,
Unhurt by force, and time's destroying rage:
For were they weak, and subject to decay,
In endless years would all have passed away, 725
By friction, force, and constant jars subdued,
Destroyed, and broken ne'er to be renewed.

Widely they err whose daring minds suppose
Fire is the principle whence all things rose,
Yes, far from reason's clearest paths they stray 730
Tho' Heraclitus boldly lead the way
That sage whose close obscurity of style
Has won the empty Greek's applauding smile

For vanity admires, and fools commend,
What reason vainly strives to comprehend ; 735
And still some fond conceit or system mark
Beneath his mystical inversions dark,
And hail the dulcet harmony of sound,
Which charms the ear as nature's lore profound.

Grant fire's pure element the source of things,
Say whence the various scene of nature springs? 740
'Tis urged, with reason vain, creative flame,
Condensed or rare, might form this wond'rous frame,
If the same subtle igneous nature roll
Thro' all the parts minute which form the whole.
Its parts compressed, the flame more ardent grows,
But rare, or scattered, less intensely glows. 746
This, and no more, thy reason can believe,
Nor e'en thy thought on such a theme conceive,

Much less that things so various and so fair
Originate from fire condensed or rare. 750
If void were granted, th' elemental fire
Might then expand, or in itself retire ;
But such concession threat'ning to o'erturn
Their system vain, with fixed resolve they spurn,
And dreading to explore the arduous way 755
Of truth sublime, in error darkly stray.
Nor, while they fear to grant an empty space,
This wild conclusion in their doctrine trace,
That one huge solid mass the whole must grow,
Whence nought could spring with emanating flow, 760
Tho' light and heat fire's subtle influence darts,
Which prove it not composed of voidless parts.

But should they urge that close condensing fire
Is changed in substance, soon must all expire ;

For whatsoe'er the destined limits flies 765
Affixed by nature, soon consumes and dies :
But elemental seeds for ay remain,
The face of things to renovate again,
Lest all in nothing's drear abyss should fall,
Or nothing all things to existence call. 770

Now certain atoms of eternal mould
In nature's realms a fixed existence hold,
Whose presence, egress, various form and range,
From fire wide diff'ring, every concrete change.
'Tis vainly urg'd, that something may retire, 775
Or come, or add, or change, if all be fire ;
For all that from an igneous source proceeds
Must hold the nature of its parent seeds.
But many bodies, if I deem aright,
By concourse, motion, order, figure, site, 780

Bid the red flame and forky blaze aspire,
Yet change their order, and the flames expire ;
Their igneous power, and e'en its semblance lost,
No more like fire the privilege they boast
Their subtle emanations to dispense, 785
And pour their fine effluvia o'er the sense.

Sure blindfold folly hails the sage her own
Who dares contend that fire exists alone ;
Against his sense he bids his sense rebel,
Shake truth's firm basis, and her lore dispel ; 790
By sense, he fondly owns, is fire confest,
Yet things as clear denies it to attest.
Strange contradiction in a sage's breast !
Rejecting sense, say what shall reason trust ?
What other test of true or false so just ? 795

'Tis equal folly all things to disclaim
As non-existing, save creative flame,
And to allow of heaven, and earth, and sky,
With all beside, yet flame alone deny.

Then wide they err who think that fires compose
The great material mass whence all things rose, 801
That moisture, air, or transmutating earth,
Each by itself might give the fabric birth.
Nor err they less who th' elements combine,
And air to fire, or earth to moisture join, 805
Or deem the four produced the whole design.

Empedocles, the chief of all the host,
Sicilia's pride and Agrigentum's boast,
Thus sung : Sicilia, round whose rugged shores
Th' Ionian surge with ceaseless thundering roars, 810

And by its rapid and contracted tides
Th' Æolian and Trinacrian shores divides,
Where dire Charybdis whirls th' engulfing waves,
And threat'ning Ætna's gathering fury raves,
From yawning jaws ejects the volleying flame, 815
And hurls red lightning to th' ethereal frame ;
Tho' many a charm this beauteous isle adorn,
Tho' rich her valleys clothed with ripening corn,
And all the stores that bounteous Ceres yields ;
Tho' arts and arms defend her fertile fields, 820
Nought can she boast, since time's remotest age,
So good, so wise, so wond'rous as the sage :
His tuneful numbers so divinely flow,
With such resplendent theories they glow,
We pause in transport o'er each well-turned line, 825
And hail the poet as of race divine !

Yet wide he errs, with each preceding name
Inferior far in wisdom and in fame.
Tho' many a truth they gloried to impart
From the rich temple of their inmost heart, 830
Tho' more sublime and worthy faith they prove
Than Pythia's tripod, or the laurel grove,
When their fond thoughts explore the source of all,
With mighty ruin e'en the mightiest fall.

And first in nature motion they allow, 835
But empty space absurdly disavow ;
Nor yet deny that things are soft or rare,
As fruits, and beasts, fire, sun, and earth, and air.

Again they urge, in all this spacious round
Division knows no fixed and certain bound. 840

No point extreme in body will they own,
Tho' parts so small are proved by sense alone,
When things dissolve, that we may thence divine
That viewless seeds to form the whole combine.

With equal zeal and folly they pretend 845
That soft and yielding seeds with all things blend;
For such weak principles must soon decay,
And all their various compounds fade away.
Yes, all must perish, or arise from nought,
As oft before my Muse has clearly taught. 850
Besides, such principles must ever jar
In venom'd hatred and intestine war,
Doomed in the strife, like showery mists, to fly
With storms and lightnings thro' the angry sky.

If all to four prime elements dissolve, 855

Whence nature bids her various forms evolve,

Why deem not things as well the parent stem

Of th' elements, as th' elements of them?

For each to each transmutes in endless years,

Till total change in hue and form appears. 860

But shouldst thou still the curious theme pursue,

And deem that air and fire, or earth and dew,

May mix, combine, and blend, yet each retain

Its proper nature, 'tis opinion vain.

From such gross union of corporeal things 865

Nor herb, nor tree, nor animation springs.

Then would each element assert its right

In every concrete form to greet the light;

Earth mixed with subtle air arrest the view,

And fire's destructive form with crystal dew. 870

But all primordial elements must lie
Hid from the glance of every mortal eye,
And ne'er a jarring principle display,
To spoil their congress, or their end betray.

Those sages too, with vain attempt, conspire 875
To prove that lightning and th' ethereal fire
Transmute to air, from air that rain descends,
And last in earth the transmutation ends ;
From earth again the liquid dews arise,
Then air and lighter heat remount the skies : 880
Thus change from earth ascends the starry pole,
From heaven meets earth, and thus pervades the whole.
But no such change organic atoms know,
Lest all reduced by time to nought should flow ;
For whatsoe'er by change its nature flies, 885
Yields to destruction, and consumes and dies.

But since air, fire, and earth, and water, feel
Pervading change, some atoms they conceal,
Which still remain immutably the same,
To renovate the world's decaying frame, 890
Lest all should fall to nought—and therefore rest
In this—that secret principles invest
The mass of being : as they shift their range,
Join or withdraw, to different forms they change ;
Thus make the seeds of fire more slow or rare, 895
And blazing flame transmutes to balmy air.

Justly you urge that only genial earth
Gives germs of life and vegetation birth ;
That did not breezes and the fragrant shower
Feed the young plant, and nurse the tender flower,
And bright from heaven the golden orb of day 901
Diffuse on all his life-supporting ray,

Nor birds, nor beasts, nor herbs of cheerful green,
Nor blushing flowers, would deck the vernal scene.
And did not due supplies of drink and food 905
Feed the full veins, and roll the sprightly blood,
Life soon would languish, and with rapid haste
From juiceless bones and nerves consuming waste.
True, let me own, peculiar food bestows
Peculiar properties, whence body grows ; 910
Because first seeds, tho' common, when they mix
In various mode, on various forms they fix ;
And from their different site and motion springs
All nature's fair variety of things.
Heaven, earth, and seas, the sun and starry sky, 915
Herbs, plants, and trees, and all that walk or fly,
Rise from the same primordial seeds conjoined,
In num'rous modes commingled and combined.

Mark, as my easy verse spontaneous flows,
How common letters various words compose, 920
Though verse from verse and word from word be found
To differ widely both in sense and sound :
And hence convicted, let thy reason own
What wond'rous change position forms alone.
Thus common seeds more num'rous far unite 925
In all the diff'rent forms that greet the light.

Now, my bold Muse, another theme pursue,
Which Anaxagoras first sagely drew,
Named Homoæmery in Achaian tongue,
But by th' Ausonian Muses yet unsung ; 930
Barren of words, no kindred term they own,
Yet by description is the doctrine known :
'Tis this—that all things from primordial seed
In shape and nature like themselves proceed,

As bones from bonelings, and from drops of blood
Minute, commingling, flows the crimson flood ; 936
From golden particles together rolled
Spring the dense glories of resplendent gold ;
Fire springs from fire, from water water flows,
And earth herself from smaller earths arose. 940

Here errs the sage, pretending to maintain
Endless division, and deny inane.
Besides, his seeds, if like the works they frame,
Their nature, powers, and properties the same,
Are feeble, soft, nor destined to endure, 945
From slow decay and wasting time secure.
If dissolution with their forms engage,
Could aught escape his wild unbridled rage?
Fled his dire jaw could subtle air aspire,
Or blood, or bone, or light-winged dew, or fire? 950

No—all must perish, by some force subdued,
And sink and perish, ne'er to be renewed.
But long before my Muse has clearly taught,
From nought nought springs, and nought returns to
nought.

But since the body grows from drink and food, 955
'Tis plain that flesh, and bones, and nerves, and blood,
Are each of different principles combined.
And if all food, whate'er its form or kind,
Within its well-compounded mass retains
The infant germs of bones, and nerves, and veins, 960
Whatever viands nature's waste supply,
Or gross, or fine, or liquefied, or dry,
Are het'rogeneous, as their forms preserve
The different seeds of bones, blood, veins, and nerve.

If all the varying tribes of parent earth 965
Lodge in her womb before they spring to birth,
The earth herself, with every tribe and class
Of things created, is a compound mass.
If wood conceal smoke, ashes, latent flame,
Say, is not wood a het'rogeneous frame? 970
With vain evasion would the sage contend,
Tho' many principles in bodies blend,
The most prevailing only meets the sight,
While all the rest lie hid in darkest night.
But simple reason such a thought refutes: 975
When the swift mill-stone grinds the ripened fruits,
Crushed from its secret source, the oozing gore
With crimson hue would tinge the mealy store;
And every herb that decks the vernal field,
Like flowing udders, lacteous moisture yield: 980

Each comminuted glebe would bid us see
The forms minute of every plant and tree,
And wood disparted by a sudden stroke
Emit its latent ashes, flame, and smoke.
Yet no such mixture meets the wond'ring view, 985
Whence sure experience deems the fact untrue :
But common atoms, though they shun the light,
In many a latent mode in things unite.

When storms impetuous sweep the mountain side,
And shake the woods with all their branchy pride,
From rapid friction springs the latent fire, 991
Till high to heaven the blazing flames aspire ;
Yet not in wood the igneous atoms glow,
The scattered seeds of fire from friction flow.
Lodged in the wood in secret if they lay, 995
Soon would they burst aspiring to the day,

Scorning concealment, all their fury raise,
And wrap the crackling forests in a blaze.

That much depends, as erst my Muse has sung,
On junction of the seeds whence bodies sprung, 1000
Or on their mutual motive powers alone,
Or change of posture, let thy reason own :
A diff'rence small in figure or in frame,
Or in arrangement, forms or wood or flame ;
As some slight change by letters thus express 1005
May to the mind or *fir** or *fire* suggest.

But shouldst thou deem whatever nature breeds
Is but the transcript of its parent seeds,
Of principles no more the Muse contends,
But here at once her disputation ends. 1010

* Ignis aut lignis.

Thy doctrine granted, lo ! some seeds appear
Down their moist cheeks to pour the briny tear,
While others seem their sorrows to deride,
And, filled with laughter, shake each tiny side.

Now let a loftier strain thy ear allure, 1015
Tho' harsh the theme, and rugged and obscure ;
Yet my bold heart the arduous task essays,
Struck by the thyrsus of immortal praise.
The Muse's sacred lore my soul inspires,
Exalts, transports, and warms with all her fires, 1020
And bids my steps Pierian wilds explore,
Where poet's footsteps never strayed before.
How my rapt spirit joys her flight to wing,
The first to quaff th' unknown untasted spring !
How do I joy to cull the new-born flowers, 1025
And form a chaplet in Parnassian bowers,

Where never muse before a chaplet twined
Around my brows with deathless fame to bind !
For I the first essayed in arduous strain
To burst the links of superstition's chain, 1030
And now on themes obscure bright splendour roll,
And with Musæan beauty clothe the whole.
As learned physicians, by experience wise,
The bitter med'cines for a child disguise,
His taste to flatter, and deceive his view, 1035
With honeyed sweets the goblet's brim bedew,
Caught by the lure, the draught unhurt he drains,
And feels new health and vigour swell his veins ;
Thus I my theme, ungrateful to the ear,
Deemed by the many charmless and severe, 1040
In tuneful numbers to adorn essay,
And with Musæan honey tinge my lay,

Fired with the hope thy bosom to delight,
And pour o'er nature's darkness copious light.

Since my bold Muse of seeds material sung, 1045
Eternal solid whence creation sprung,
If thought can count them let us boldly try,
Or if they yield an infinite supply,
Whether fixed barriers bound the wide inane,
In which is placed the seat of nature's reign, 1050
Or if it stretch without a term or bound,
A dread illimitable vast profound.

The mighty whole no destined limits bind,
Or where has thought its verge extreme assigned?
No bound to body can the vision trace, 1055
Unless beyond its bounds, in vacant space,

Whence she may mark the dark impervious line,
Oppose her progress, and her power confine.
But since beyond the total nothing lies,
No certain bounds the universe comprise. 1060
From whate'er point th' inquiry you commence,
'Tis boundless all, in every part immense.

Suppose fixed barriers should the whole surround,
Were one, swift rushing to the utmost bound,
A rapid dart with all his force to fling, 1065
Its onward way progressive would it wing?
Or would some solid mound its flight withstand,
And back repel it to the darter's hand?
Whiche'er you grant, the doctrine is the same,
No limit bounds the universal frame; 1070
For if the flying jav'lin force its way,
Or if its progress some firm barrier stay,

Not yet the utmost verge of things you view ;
And if this simple plan you still pursue,
Where'er th' experimental stand you place, 1075
Beyond it lies the vast immense of space,
Girt by no bounds around, or low, or high,
The void still stretches, and the dart may fly.
Did certain limits close and bind the whole,
Down to one heap the ponderous seeds would roll,
No radiant sun would light the concave skies,
Nor, under heaven, aught meet our wondering eyes ;
But to one centre would all matter pass,
And form in time a vast unwieldy mass.
But since organic seeds can never flow 1085
To one fixed centre, no repose they know ;
For ever tossed, in endless whirls they fly
Matter's eternal infinite supply.

A certain barrier other bodies bounds ;
 Hills bound th' horizon, air the hills surrounds ; 1090
 Earth girds the sea, round earth the billows roll ;
 But nought e'er bounds th' illimitable whole.
 Should blazing lightning urge its swift career
 For the long lapse of time's eternal year,
 Thro' nature's realms would nought its progress bound,
 But still beyond it stretch th' immense profound. 1096

But nature's self declares her boundless reign,
 For void bounds body, body bounds th' inane ;
 Each beyond each in round alternate lies,
 A mighty whole which bounds can ne'er comprise.
 But grant that either has its destined ends, 1101
 Or space alone to infinite extends,
 Nor ~~earth, nor~~ ^{earth} ocean, nor heaven's bright abodes,
 Nor man's frail offspring, nor the race of gods,

Could last an hour, but, broken and destroyed, 1105
Be whirled in ruin thro' the boundless void.
Or rather, ne'er had bodies hailed the light,
For seeds once scattered ne'er could reunite ;
And sure no innate thought or prescient mind
Lodged in themselves primordial seeds combined, 1110
But thro' th' immense of space for ages tossed,
In many a rude and various conflict crossed,
Thro' every shape, in every motion hurled,
They coalesced, and formed the present world ;
And still as years on years progressive roll, 1115
Their own fixed nature regulates the whole,
Pours the deep rivers in th' insatiate seas,
Wafts the light vapours on the sunny breeze,
Bids fruits expand, the tribes of creatures grow,
And heaven's revolving fires for ever glow. 1120

But did not matter infinite supply
The waste of nature, all would quickly die.
As from the living tribes the flesh and blood
Flow fast away when unsupplied with food,
So, did not matter lend its plastic aid, 1125
And feed and cherish, all would droop and fade.
Nor could external force the mass controul,
Preserve or regulate the concrete whole,
Or make first seeds in frequent congress meet,
And these detain till those the sum complete. 1130
For while some atoms brought a due supply,
Freed by the shock, would others start and fly,
Whence new accretions of primordial seed,
In constant quick succession, must succeed,
And atoms numberless must still compose 1135
E'en those accretions whence all body grows.

O Memmius ! shun what some with zeal defend,
That all things to a certain centre tend,
That free and unsupported nature stands,
And no accretion of new seeds demands, 1140
Fixed to one centre, nor can low or high
Burst its fixed bonds, and from its station fly.
But can thy soul the wild idea feign,
That aught unbalanced may itself sustain ?
That ponderous bodies upward pressure make, 1145
Like our dark shadows in the crystal lake ?
Yet men, they argue, walk the adverse sphere,
Their feet to ours, and know no idle fear
Lest they fall headlong to the nether sky,
No more than we lest up to heaven we fly. 1150
When first they hail the golden orb of light,
The stars of heaven burst glorious on our sight ;

With us alternate day and night they claim,
And all the year's vicissitudes the same.

But all such system from dark error springs, 1155
Perverse and wandering from the source of things.
For say, what centre can the fancy feign
Within th' illimitable vast inane ?
But grant the centre, what attractive law
Would various bodies to that centre draw ? 1160
Sure every part in void's resistless field
Must easy way to ponderous bodies yield,
Where'er by motion urged ; nor high, nor low,
Nor verge, nor centre, is it theirs to know
In all the wide immeasurable void, 1165
Where weight is lost, and motive power destroyed ;
Nor could th' impassive void support the mass,
But still must yield, and let all body pass ;

Whence no fixed medium bodies ever knew,
Nor with attraction to a centre flew. 1170
Nor do this system's advocates pretend
That all things downward to a centre tend,
But only pond'rous bodies like the tide
And earth, and torrents from the mountain side.
For air, they teach, ascends th' ethereal skies, 1175
And soaring upwards rapid flames arise ;
Whence thro' deep azure stars unnumbered roll
With trembling radiance round the golden pole,
As from the centre shoot fire's mingling rays,
Lights their pure lamps, and feeds the solar blaze.
(Thus fed by earth, her living species grow, 1181
Shoots the green branch, and flowers expanding blow ;
But nought could this terrestrial scene produce
Did earth refuse her alimental juice.)

They fondly urge that heaven the whole surrounds
With solid, strong, insuperable bounds, 1186
Lest like winged flame the barriers of the sphere
Should sudden burst, and thro' the void career,
And heaven's bright temples 'mid their thunder fall,
Earth sink beneath, and ruin whelm us all, 1190
Dissolved to atoms, and with earth and heaven
Far thro' th' enormous waste confus'dly driven,
Nor in an instant leave behind a trace
But senseless atoms and deserted space.
From whate'er point primordial seeds you strike,
That moment ruin grasps the whole alike, 1196
The gates of death fly open to the blow,
Thro' which th' out-rushing seeds of crowded matter
flow.

These lines, O Memmius ! with attention scan ;
Truth springs from truth more clear in nature's plan ;
Then shall no gloomy night obstruct thy way, 1201
But round thee glorious blaze refulgent day,
The mighty scheme assist thee to pursue,
And lay all nature open to thy view.

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————— One great Lord of all
Formed this fair scene, and poised this earthly ball:
No subtle atoms of eternal mould
Danced in the void, till chance together rolled
Their senseless forms; although thy daring mind,
Vast as thy theme, as Greece's taste refined,

Sublime Lucretius ! from th' Athenian sage
 Caught the high flame of philosophic rage,
 And with the muse's noblest frenzy sung,
 That all from brute unconscious matter sprung.
 O ! impotence of reason, blind and vain !
 How could thy soul the wild idea feign !
 See yon bright orb diffuse his golden rays,
 See heaven's high arch, where stars unnumbered blaze ;
 Dart thy quick glance thro' ocean, earth, and air,
 A scene so grand, so wise, so wond'rous fair !
 Thy powers of body and of mind behold,
 Creature of earthly and ethereal mould ;
 Shrink in thyself, and question deep thy soul,
 Warm through thy heart did chance the life-blood roll,
 Or fire yon dazzling orb, or form the mighty whole ?
 Struck with deep awe th' admiring peasant stands,
 Lifts the adoring eye, and spreads his hands ;
 And shall the sage, in impious error brave,
 Question that power, which power to question gave ?
 The thought that only doubts, in folly blind,
 Itself confutes, for mind must spring from mind.
 Yes, one great Cause formed this amazing scene,
 Fired every star, and spread yon blue serene ;
 Bade thro' the heart the ruddy current roll,
 And breathed thro' moulded clay the thinking soul.
 In every wing that cuts th' aërial tides,
 In every fin that thro' the ocean glides,
 In every shell that studs the sea-beat strand,
 And bud and flower which western gales expand,
 Such beauty mingles with such reach of thought,
 As nought, save power divine, could e'er have wrought.

He, only He, with wisdom's stores replete,
 He in whose essence all perfections meet;
 His is the storm, the whirlwind, and the shower,
 The blazing lightning, and the thunder's power :
 'Mid the deep floods he built the rock-ribbed earth,
 And bade the rocks and mountains spring to birth.
 When Fate in darkness stalks her dismal round,
 When oceans whelm, and earthquakes rock the ground,
 'Tis He who sends the fell destroyer forth,
 Spreads the wet South, and drives the freezing North,
 Who treads the surge, the bolt's red vengeance flings,
 And walks upon the Tempest's sounding wings.
 Chained down to earth, or rapt to heaven abroad,
 In all we see an omnipresent God ;
 And every cause in nature's ample reign
 Forms but a link of that eternal chain,
 Which holds earth, seas, and skies, and worlds unknown,
 Hung in stupendous poise from God's almighty throne.

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