

PROLOGUE.

VIA VITAE.

I.

My head is split. The crashing axe
Of the agony of things shears through
The stupid skull: out spurt the brains.
The universe revolves, then cracks,
Then roars in dissolution due;
And I am counting up the gains
And losses of a life afire
With dust of thought and dulled desire.

II.

So, all is over. I admit
Futility the lord of will.
Life was an episode, for me
As for the meanest monad, knit
To man by mightier bonds than skill
Of subtle-souled psychology
May sever. Aim in chaos? None.
The soul rolls senseless as the sun.

III.

Existence, as we know it, spins
A fatal warp, a woof of woe.
There is no place for God or soul.
Works, hopes, prayers, sacrifices, sins
Are jokes. The cosmos happened so :
Innocent all of guide or goal.
Else, what were man's appointed term ?
To feed God's friend, the coffin-worm !

IV.

Laugh, thou immortal Lesbian !
Thy verse runs down the runic ages.
Where shalt thou be when sun and star,
My sun, my star, the vault that span,
Rush in their rude, impassive rages
Down to some centre guessed afar
By mindless Law ? Their death-embrace
A simple accident of space ?

V.

Where is thy fame, when million leagues
Of flaming gas absorb the roll
Of many a system ruinous hurled
With infinite pains and dire fatigues
To build another stupid soul
For fools to call another world ?
Where then thy fame, O soul sublime ?
Where then thy victory over Time ?

VI.

Wilt thou seek deeper than the fact?
Take refuge in a city of mind?
Build thee an house, and call it heaven?
Rush on! there foams the cataract,
Blind steersman leader of the blind,
Sole devil herald of the seven
Thy garnished halls should house, O Christ,
Thou being dead, thou sacrificed

VII.

Not for atonement, not for bliss;
Truly for nothing: so it was.
Nay, friends, think well! Renounce the
dream!
Seek not some mystery in the kiss,
Some virtue in the chrysopras,
Some nymph or undine in the stream.
Things as we know them should be enough
To glut our misery and our love.

VIII.

Why must despair to madness drive
The myriad fools that fear to die?
God's but a fervid phantom drawn
Out of the hasty-ordered hive
Of thoughts that battle agony
In the melancholy hours of dawn.
When vital force at lowest ebbs
Anaemic nerves weave frailest webs.

IX.

So, be content! Should science cleave
The veil of things and show us peace,
Well:—but by wild imagining
Think not a golden robe to weave!
Such moulder. By fantastic ease
Ye come not well to anything.
Work and be sober: dotage thinks
By worth of words to slay the Sphinx.

X.

Things as they are—of these take hold,
Their heart of wonder throb to thine!
All things are matter and force and sense,
No two alone. All's one: the gold
Of truth is no reward divine
Of faith, but wage of evidence.
The clod, the God, the spar, the star
Metre in thy measure, as they are!

XI.

So lifts the agony of the world
From this mine head, that bowed awhile
Before the terror suddenly shown.
The nameless fear for self, far hurled
By death to dissolution vile,
Fades as the royal truth is known:
Though change and sorrow range and roll,
There is no self—there is no soul!

XII.

As man, a primate risen high
Above his fellows, work thou well!
As man, an incident minute
And dim in time's eternity,
Work well! As man, no toy for hell
And heaven to wrangle for, be mute!
Let empty speculation stir
The idle fool, the craven cur!

XIII.

Myself being idle for an hour
I dare one thing to speculate:
Namely, that life hath cusps yet higher
On this our curve: a prize, a power
Lies in our grasp: unthinking Fate
Shall build a brain to nestle nigher
Unto the ultimate Truth: I burn
To live that later lives may learn.

XIV.

Simple to say; to do complex!
That we this higher type of man
May surely generate, o' nights
Our lesser brains we vainly vex.
Our knowledge lacks; we miss the plan.
Fools hope our luck will set to rights
Our skill that's baulked. Yet now we know
At least the way we wish to go.

XV.

This task assume! Colossal mind
And toil transcending, concentrate
Not on the metaphysic wild;
Not on the deserts vast and blind
Of dark Religion; not on Fate,
The barren ocean; but the Child
Shows us a beacon in the night;
A lens to lure and lend the light.

XVI.

Wisdom and Love, intenser glow!
Beauty and Strength, increase and burn!
Be brothers to the law of life!
Things as they are—their nature know!
Act! Nor for faith nor folly turn!
The hour is nigh when man and wife,
Knowing, shall worship face to face,
Beget and bear the royal race.