A silence sealed the irrevocable decree,  
The word of Fate that fell from heavenly lips  
Fixing a doom no power could ever reverse  
Unless heaven's will itself could change its course.

5  
Or so it seemed: yet from the silence rose  
One voice that questioned changeless destiny,  
A will that strove against the immutable Will.

A mother's heart had heard the fateful speech  
That rang like a sanction to the call of death  
And came like a chill close to life and hope.

10  
Yet hope sank down like an extinguished fire.  
She felt the leaden inevitable hand  
Invade the secrecy of her guarded soul  
And smite with sudden pain its still content  
And the empire of her hard-won quietude.

15  
Awhile she fell to the level of human mind,  
A field of mortal grief and Nature's law;  
She shared, she bore the common lot of men  
And felt what common hearts endure in Time.

20  
Voicing earth's question to the inscrutable power  
The queen now turned to the still immobile seer:  
Assailed by the discontent in Nature's depths,  
Partner in the agony of dumb driven things  
And all the misery, all the ignorant cry,

25  
Passionate like sorrow questioning heaven she spoke.  
Lending her speech to the surface soul on earth  
She uttered the suffering in the world's dumb heart  
And man's revolt against his ignorant fate.

30  
“O seer, in the earth's strange twi-natured life  
By what pitiless adverse Necessity  
Or what cold freak of a Creator's will,  
By what random accident or governed Chance  
That shaped a rule out of fortuitous steps,

35  
Made destiny from an hour's emotion, came  
Into the unreadable mystery of Time  
The direr mystery of grief and pain?

40  
Is it thy God who made this cruel law?  
Or some disastrous Power has marred his work  
And he stands helpless to defend or save?

A fatal seed was sown in life's false start  
When evil twinned with good on earthly soil.

45  
Then first appeared the malady of mind,  
Its pang of thought, its quest for the aim of life.

It twisted into forms of good and ill  
The frank simplicity of the animal's acts;  
It turned the straight path hewn by the body's gods,  
Followed the zigzag of the uncertain course  
Of life that wanders seeking for its aim.

50  
In the pale starlight falling from thought's skies,  
Its guides the unsure idea, the wavering will.
Lost was the instinct's safe identity
With the arrow-point of being's inmost sight,
Marred the sure steps of Nature's simple walk
And truth and freedom in the growing soul.

Out of some ageless innocence and peace,
Privilege of souls not yet betrayed to birth,
Cast down to suffer on this hard dangerous earth
Our life was born in pain and with a cry.

Although earth-nature welcomes heaven's breath
Inspiring Matter with the will to live,
A thousand ills assail the mortal's hours
And wear away the natural joy of life;
Our bodies are an engine cunningly made,
But for all its parts as cunningly are planned,
Contrived ingeniously with demon skill,
Its apt inevitable heritage
Of mortal danger and peculiar pain,
Its payment of the tax of Time and Fate,
Its way to suffer and its way to die.

This is the ransom of our high estate,
The sign and stamp of our humanity.
A grisly company of maladies
Come, licensed lodgers, into man's bodily house,
Purveyors of death and torturers of life.

In the malignant hollows of the world,
In its subconscient cavern-passages
Ambushed they lie waiting their hour to leap,
Surrounding with danger the sieged city of life:
Admitted into the citadel of man's days
They mine his force and maim or suddenly kill.

Ourselves within us lethal forces nurse;
We make of our own enemies our guests:
Out of their holes like beasts they creep and gnaw
The chords of the divine musician's lyre
Till frayed and thin the music dies away
Or crashing snaps with a last tragic note.

All that we are is like a fort beset:
All that we strive to be alters like a dream
In the grey sleep of Matter's ignorance.

Mind suffers lamed by the world's disharmony
And the unloveliness of human things.
A treasure misspent or cheaply, fruitlessly sold
In the bazaar of a blind destiny,
A gift of priceless value from Time's gods
Lost or mislaid in an uncaring world,
Life is a marvel missed, an art gone wry;
A seeker in a dark and obscure place,
An ill-armed warrior facing dreadful odds,
An imperfect worker given a baffling task,

An ignorant judge of problems Ignorance made,
Its heavenward flights reach closed and keyless gates,
Its glorious outbursts peter out in mire.
On Nature's gifts to man a curse was laid:  
All walks inarmed by its own opposites,

105 Error is the comrade of our mortal thought  
And falsehood lurks in the deep bosom of truth,  
Sin poisons with its vivid flowers of joy  
Or leaves a red scar burnt across the soul;  
Virtue is a grey bondage and a gaol.

110 At every step is laid for us a snare.  
Alien to reas  
on and the spirit's light,  
Our fount of action from a darkness wells;  
In ignorance and nescience are our roots.

A growing register of calamities  
Is the past's account, the future's book of Fate:  
The centuries pile man's follies and man's crimes  
Upon the countless crowd of Nature's ills;  
As if the world's stone load was not enough,  
A crop of miseries obstinately is sown

120 By his own hand in the furrows of the gods,  
The vast increasing tragic harvest reaped  
From old misdeeds buried by oblivious Time.

He walks by his own choice into Hell's trap;  
This mortal creature is his own worst foe.

His science is an artificer of doom;  
He ransacks earth for means to harm his kind;  
He slays his happiness and others' good.

Nothing has he learned from Time and its history;  
Even as of old in the raw youth of Time,

130 When Earth ignorant ran on the highways of Fate,  
Old forms of evil cling to the world's soul:  
War making nought the sweet smiling calm of life,  
Battle and rapine, ruin and massacre  
Are still the fierce pastimes of man's warring tribes;

135 An idiot hour destroys what centuries made,  
His wanton rage or frenzied hate lays low  
The beauty and greatness by his genius wrought  
And the mighty output of a nation's toil.  
All he has achieved he drags to the precipice.

140 His grandeur he turns to an epic of doom and fall;  
His littleness crawls content through squalor and mud,  
He calls heaven's retribution on his head  
And wallows in his self-made misery.

A part author of the cosmic tragedy,

145 His will conspires with death and time and fate.  
His brief appearance on the enigmaed earth  
Ever recurs but brings no high result  
To this wanderer through the aeon-rings of God  
That shut his life in their vast longevity.

150 His soul's wide search and ever returning hopes  
Pursue the useless orbit of their course  
In a vain repetition of lost toils  
Across a track of soon forgotten lives.  
All is an episode in a meaningless tale.
155 Why is it all and wherefore are we here?
If to some being of eternal bliss
It is our spirit's destiny to return
Or some still impersonal height of endless calm,
Since That we are and out of That we came,

160 Whence rose the strange and sterile interlude
Lasting in vain through interminable Time?
Who willed to form or feign a universe
In the cold and endless emptiness of Space?
Or if these beings must be and their brief lives,
What need had the soul of ignorance and tears?
Whence rose the call for sorrow and for pain?
Or all came helplessly without a cause?
What power forced the immortal spirit to birth?
The eternal witness once of eternity,

170 A deathless sojourner mid transient scenes,
He camps in life's half-lit obscurity
Amid the debris of his thoughts and dreams.
Or who persuaded it to fall from bliss
And forfeit its immortal privilege?

175 Who laid on it the ceaseless will to live
A wanderer in this beautiful, sorrowful world,
And bear its load of joy and grief and love?
Or if no being watches the works of Time,
What hard impersonal Necessity

180 Compels the vain toil of brief living things?
A great Illusion then has built the stars.
But where then is the soul's security,
Its poise in this circling of unreal suns?
Or else it is a wanderer from its home

185 Who strayed into a blind alley of Time and chance
And finds no issue from a meaningless world.
Or where begins and ends Illusion's reign?
Perhaps the soul we feel is only a dream,
Eternal self a fiction sensed in trance.”