

Fragments

ΠΕΡΙ ΦΥΣΕΩΣ

Empedocles

tr. William Ellery Leonard

ΠΕΡΙ ΦΥΣΕΩΣ · On Nature

I will report a twofold truth. Now grows
The One from Many into being, now
ITwofold the birth, twofold the death of things:
LEor, now, the meeting of the Many brings
To birth and death; and, now, whatever grew
From out their sundering, flies apart and dies.; And this long
interchange shall never end.
Whiles into One do all through Love unite;
Whiles too the same are rent through hate of Strife.
And in so far as is the One still wont
To grow from Many, and the Many, again
Spring from primeval scattering of the One
So far have they a birth and mortal date;
And in so far as the long interchange
Ends not, so far forever established gods
Around the circle of the world they move.
But come! but hear my words!
For knowledge
Makes strong thy soul. For as before I spake
Naming the utter goal of these my words
I will report a twofold truth. Now grows
The One from Many into being, now
Even from the One disparting come the Many, —Fire, Water, Earth and
awful heights of Air;
And shut from them apart, the deadly Strife
In equipoise, and Love within their midst
In all her being in length and breadth the same.
Behold her now with mind, and sit not there
Ab es established in the limbs of men.
Through her they cherish thoughts of love, through
Perfect the works of concord, calling her
By name Delight or Aphrodite clear.
She speeds revolving in the elements

But this no mortal man hath ever learned —Hear thou the undelusive
course of proof:

Behold those elements own equal strength

And equal origin; each rules its task;

And unto each its primal mode; and each

Prevailing conquers with revolving time.

And more than these there is no birth nor end;

For were they wasted ever and evermore

They were no longer, and the great All were then

How to be plenished and from what far coast?

And how, besides, might they to ruin come

Since nothing lives that empty is of them ?—No, these are all, and, as
they course along

Through one another, now this, now that is born —And so forever

down Eternity. Love. Love and Hate in the Organic World The

world-wide warfare of the eternal Two

Well in the mass of human limbs is shown:

Whiles into one do they through Love unite

And mortal members take the body's form

And life doth flower at the prime; and whiles

Again dissevered by the Hates perverse

They wander far and wide and up and down

The surf-swept beaches and drear shores of life.

So too with thicket, tree, and gleaming fish

Housed in the crystal walls of waters wide;

And so with beasts that couch on mountain slopes.

And water-fowls that skim the long blue sea. From the Elements is All

We See But come, and to my words foresaid look well

If their wide witness anywhere forgot

Aught that behooves the elemental forms:

Behold the Sun, the warm, the bright-diffused;

Behold the eternal Stars, forever steeped

In liquid heat and glowing radiance; see

Also the Rain, obscure and cold and dark
And how from Earth streams forth the Green and
Firm.
And all through Wrath are split to shapes diverse;
And each through Love draws near and yearns foreach.
For from these elements hath budded all
That was or is or evermore shall be —By varied mingling and enduring
change. For amber Sun and Earth and Heaven and Sea
Is friendly with its every part that springs
Far driven and scattered, in the mortal world;
So too those things that are most apt to mix
Are like, and love by Aphrodite's best.
But hostile chiefly are those things which most
From one another differ, both in birth.
And in their mixing and their molded forms—Unwont to mingle,
miserable and lone.
After the counsels of their father, Hate.

An Analogy

Through wits of cunning — paint with streak and
Bright temple-tablets, and will seize in hand
The oozy poisons pied and red and gold
From which they fashion forms innumerable
And like to all things, peopling a fresh world
Even so the spring of mortal things, leastwise
Of all the host born visible to man.
O guard this knowledge well, for thou hast heard
In this my song the Goddess and her tale.

The Speculative Thinker

To join together diverse peaks of thought
And not complete one road that has no turn.

An Aphorism

What must be said, may well be said twice o'er.

The Law of the Elements

In turn they conquer as the cycles roll
And wane the one to other still, and wax
The one to other in turn by olden Fate;
For these are all, and, as they course along
Through one another, they become both men
And multitudinous tribes of hairy beasts;
Whiles in fair order through Love united all
Whiles rent asunder by the hate of Strife
Till they, when grown into the One and All
Once more, once more go under and succumb.
And in so far as is the One still wont
To grow from the Many, and the Many, again
Spring from primeval scattering of the One
So far have they a birth and mortal date.
And in so far as this long interchange
Ends not, so far forever established gods
Around the circle of the world they move.

The Sphere

There views one not the swift limbs of the Sun
Nor there the strength of shaggy Earth, nor Sea;
But in the strong recess of

Harmony Exultant in surrounding solitude. Nor faction nor

fight unseemly in its limbs.

The Sphere on every side the boundless same

Exultant in surrounding solitude. For from its back there swing no
branching arms.

It hath no feet nor knees alert, nor form

Of life-producing member, — on all sides

A sphere it was, and like unto itself. Yet after mighty Strife had waxen
great

Within the members of the Sphere, and rose

To her own honors, as the times arrived

Which unto each in turn, to Strife, to Love

Should come by amplest oath and old. decree...

For one by one did quake the limbs of God.

The joint binds two. But as when rennet of the fig-tree juice

Curdles the white milk, and will bind it fast...

Cementing meal with water But hurrying back, I now will make return

To paths of festal song, laid down before

Draining each flowing thought from flowing thought.

When down the Vortex to the last abyss

Had foundered Hate, and Lovingness had reached

The eddying center of the Mass, behold

Around her into Oneness gathered all.

Yet not a-sudden, but only as willingly

Each from its several region joined with each;

And from their mingling thence are poured abroad

The multitudinous tribes of mortal things.

Yet much unmixed among the mixed reigned

As much as Hate still held in scales, aloft.

For not all blameless did Hate yield and stand

Out yonder on the circle's utmost bounds;

But partwise yet within he stayed, partwise

Was he already from the members gone.

And ever the more skulked away and fled

Then ever the more, and nearer, inward pressed
The gentle minded, the divine Desire
Of blameless Lovingness.
Thence grew apace
Those mortal Things, erstwhile long wont to be
Immortal, and the erstwhile pure and sheer
Were mixed, exchanging highways of new life.
And from their mingling thence are poured abroad
The multitudinous tribes of mortal things And as they came together.
Hate began
To take his stand far on the outer verge.
And Earth through Earth her figure magnifies
And Air through Air.

The World as It Now Is

Come ! I will name the like-primeval Four
Whence rose to sight all things we now behold—Earth, many-billowed
Sea, and the moist Air
And Aether, the Titan, who binds the globe about.

Earth and Air not Illimitable

Were the white Ether, as forsooth some tongues
Have idly prated in the babbling mouths
Of those who little of the All have seen...

Sun and Moon

Keen-darting Helios and Selenemild. Attendant round the

mighty space of heaven The moon, in passing under, covers o'er.
And darkens a bleak tract of earth as large
As is the breadth of her, the silver-eyed.
As sunbeam striking on the moon's broad disk.
Toward Olympos back he darts his beams
With fearless face. of alien light. nave, which round
Even as revolves a chariot's
The outmost...
For toward the sacred circle of her lord
She gazes face to face.
But earth makes night for beams of sinking sun.

The Darkling Night

Of night, the lonely, with her sightless eyes.
Iris from sea brings wind or mighty rain.

Fire

And fire sprang upward with a rending speed.

The Volcano

And many a fire there burns beneath the ground.
For sometimes so upon its course it met
And oft times otherwise.

Things Passing Strange

In Earth sank Ether with deep-stretching roots.
Earth's sweat, the sea.
The salt grew solid, smitten by beams of sun.

Strange Creatures of Olden Times

There budded many a head without a neck.
And arms were roaming, shoulderless and bare
In isolation wandered every
Hither and thither seeing union meet.
But now as God with God was mingled more
These members fell together where they met
And many a birth besides was then begot
In a long line of ever varied life. Many were born with twofold brow
and breast
Some with the face of man on bovine stock
Some with man's form beneath a bovine head
Mixed shapes of being with shadowed secret parts.
Sometimes like men, and sometimes womangrowths. But come! now
hear how 'twas the sundered Fire
Led into life the germs, erst whelmed in night
Of men and women, the pitied and bewailed;
For 'tis a tale that sees and knows its mark.
First rose mere lumps of earth with rude impress
That had their shares of Water and of Warm.
Albeit not yet had they revealed a form
Of lovely limbs, nor yet a human cry
Nor secret member, common to the male.

The Process of Human Generation To-day

But separate is the birth of human limbs;
For 'tis in part in man's... Into clean wombs the seeds are poured, and
when
Therein they meet with Cold, the birth is girls;
And boys, when contrariwise they meet with Warm. Into the cloven
meads of Aphrodite.
For bellies with the warmer wombs become
Mothers of boys, and therefore men are dark
More stalwart and more shaggy. On the tenth day, in month the eighth,
the blood
Becomes white pus. Twice bearing.
Sheepskin.

On Animals and Plants

And if belief lack pith, and thou still doubt
How from the mingling of the elements.
So many forms and hues of mortal things
Could thus have being, as have come to be
Each framed and knit by Aphrodite's power... As the tall trees and fish
in briny floods.

As Kypris, after watering Earth with Rain
Zealous to heat her, then did give Earth o'er
To speed of Fire that then she might grow firm.
Leading the songless shoals of spawning fish.
Of beasts, inside compact with outsides loose.
Which, in the palms of Aphrodite shaped
Got this their sponginess. '

Tis thus with conchs upon the heavy chines
Of ocean-dwellers, aye, of shell-fish wreathed
The earthen crust outside the softer parts.
Trees bore perennial fruit, perennial fronds.
Laden with fruit the whole revolving year.
Since fed forever by a fruitful air.

Thus first tall olives lay their yellow eggs. Wherefore pomegranates
slow in ripening be
And apples grow so plentiful in juice. Wine is but water fermented in
the wood
And issues from the rind. From the same stuff on sturdy limbs grow
hair
Leaves, scales of fish, and bird's thick-feathered

Our Eyes

As when a man, about to sally forth.
Prepares a light and kindles him a blaze
Of flaming fire against the wintry night.
In horny lantern shielding from all winds;
Though it protect from breath of blowing winds
Its beam darts outward, as more fine and thin
And with untiring rays lights up the sky:
Just so the Fire primeval once lay hid
In the round pupil of the eye, enclosed
In films and gauzy veils, which through and through
Were pierced with pores divinely fashioned.
And thus kept off the watery deeps around
Whilst Fire burst outward, as more fine and thin.
The gentle flame of eye did chance to get
Only a little of the earthen part. From which by Aphrodite, the divine.
The untiring eyes were formed. Thus Aphrodite wrought with bolts of
love.
One vision of two eyes is born. Knowing that all things have their
emanations. Thus Sweet seized Sweet, Bitter on Bitter flew
Sour sprung for Sour, and upon Hot rode Hot. Water to wine more
nearly is allied
But will not mix with oil.
As when one mixes with the copper tin.
With flax is mixed the silvery elder's seed.

The Black River Bottoms

And the black color of the river's deeps
Comes all from shade; and one may see the same
In hollow caves.
As, in the palms of Kypris shaped, they first
Began to grow together.
Kind Earth for her broad-breasted melting-pots got twoeight parts four.
Of the
Thence came white bones.
Divinely joined by glue of Harmony.

Blood and Flesh

And after Earth within the perfect ports
Almost in equal parts Hephaestos red
And Rain and Ether, the all-splendorous
There came our blood and all the shaples of flesh.

The Rushing Blood and the Clepsydra

And thus does all breathe in and out.
In all
Over the body's surface, bloodless tubes
Of flesh are stretched, and, at their outlets, rifts
For air, however, is cut a passage free.
And when from here the thin blood backward
The air comes rushing in with roaring swell;
But when again it forward leaps, the air
In turn breathes out; as when a little girl
Plays with a water-clock of gleaming bronze:
As long as ever the opening of the pipe
Is by her pretty fingers stopped and closed.
And thuswise plunged within the yielding mass
Of silvery water, can the Wet no more
Get in the vessel; but the air's own weight
That falls inside against the countless holes
Keeps it in check, until the child at last
When of a truth the water's destined bulk
Gets in, as air gives way.
Even so it is
When in the belly of the brazen clock
The water lies, and the girl's finger tip
Shuts pipe and tube: the air, that from without
Comes pressing inward, holds the water back
About the gateways of the gurgling neck
As the child keeps possession of the top.
Until her hand will loosen, when amain —Quite contrariwise to way
and wise before —Pours out and under the water's destined bulk
As air drops down and in. Even so it is
With the thin blood that through our members
When hurrying back it streams to inward, then
Amain a flow of air comes rushing on;
But when again it forward leaps, the air

In turn breathes out along the selfsame way.

Scent

Left by their feet along the tender grass.... And thus got all things share
of breath and smells.

On the Psychic Life

And in so far the lightest at their fall
Do strike together.... In the blood-streams, back-leaping unto it
The heart is nourished, where prevails the power
That men call thought; for lo the blood that stirs
About the heart is man's controlling thought. For unto men their thrift of
reason grows
According to the body's thrift and state.
For as of these commingled all things are.
Even so through these men think, rejoice, or grieve.
As far as mortals change by day, so far
By night their thinking changes... For 'tis through Earth that Earth we
do behold
Through Ether, divine Ether luminous
Through Water, Water, through Fire, devouring

Fire

And Love through Love, and Hate through doleful
Hate.
For if reliant on a spirit firm
With inclination and endeavor pure
Thou wilt behold them, all these things shall be
Forever thine, for service, and besides
Thereof full many another shalt thou gain;
For of themselves into that core they grow
Of each man's nature, where his essence lies.
But if for others thou wilt look and reach —Such empty treasures,
myriad and vile
As men be after, which forevermore
Blunt soul and keen desire — O then shall these
Most swiftly leave thee as the seasons roll;
For all their yearning is a quick return
Unto their own primeval stock. For know:
All things have fixed intent and share of thought.

Dominion

And thou shalt master every drug that e'er
Was made defense 'gainst sickness and old age —For thee alone all this
I will fulfil —And thou shalt calm the might of tireless winds
That burst on earth and ruin seedlands; aye.
And if thou wilt, shalt thou arouse the blasts
And watch them take their vengeance, wild and shrill
For that before thou cowedst them.
Thou shalt change
Black rain to drought, at seasons good for men
And the long drought of summer shalt thou change
To torrents, nourishing the mountain trees.
As down they stream from ether. And thou shalt
From Hades beckon the might of perished men.

The Healer and Prophet

KAΘAPMOI · The Purifications

Ye friends, who in the mighty city dwell
Along the yellow Acragas hard by
The Acropolis, ye stewards of good works
The stranger's refuge venerable and kind.
All hail, O friends! But unto ye I walk
As god immortal now, no more as man,.
On all sides honored fittingly and well
Crowned both with fillets and with flowering
When with my throngs of men and women I come
To thriving cities, I am sought by prayers
And thousands follow me that they may ask
The path to weal and vantage, craving some
For oracles, whilst others seek to hear
A healing word 'gainst many a foul disease
That all too long hath pierced with grievous pains.
Yet why urge more, as if forsooth I wrought
Some big affair — do I not far excel O friends, I know indeed in these
the words
Which I will speak that very truth abides;
But greatly troublous unto men alway
Hath been the emulous struggle of Belief
To reach their bosoms.

Expiation and Metempsychosis

There is a word of Fate, an old decree
And everlasting of the gods, made fast
Far spirits, with their lot of age-long life
Do foul their limbs with slaughter in offense.
Or swear forsworn, as failing of their pledge.
Shall wander thrice ten thousand weary years
Far from the Blessed, and be born through time
In various shapes of mortal kind, which change
Ever and ever troublous paths of life:
For now Air hunts them onward to the Sea;
Now the wild Sea disgorges them on Land;
Now Earth will spue toward beams of radiant Sun;
Whence he will toss them back to whirling Air —Each gets from other
what they all abhor.
And in that brood I too am numbered now For I was once already boy
and girl
Thicket and bird, and mute fish in the waves.

This Earth of Ours

I wept and wailed, beholding the strange place. From what large honor
and what height of bliss
Am I here fallen to move with mortal kind!

This Sky-Roofed World

And then we came unto a roofed cave.

This Vale of Tears

A joyless land
Where Slaughter and Grudge, and troops of Doomsbesides
Do wander down the dismal meads of Bane. There was Earth-mother
There the far-peering Virgin of the Sun
And bloody Quarrel and grave-eyed Harmony
And there was Fair and Foul and Speed and Late
Black-haired Confusion and sweet maiden Sure. Growth
And Filth, and Silence and prevailng Vo O mortal kind! O ye poor sons
of grief!
From such contentions and such sighings sprung!
For from the living he the dead did make In unfamiliar tunics of the
flesh. The worthiest dwellings for the SDiila_of men.
Are taway-lions, those great beasts that sleep
Couched on the black earth up the mountain side;
But, when in forms of beautiful plumed trees

The Golden Age

Nor unto them
Was any Ares god, nor Kydoimos
Nor Zeus, the king of gods, nor Kronos, nor
Poseidon then, but only Kypris queen...
Whom they with holy gifts were wont to appease.
With painted images of living things.
With costly unguents of rich fragrancy.
With gentle sacrifice of taintless myrrh
With redolent fumes of frankincense, of old
Pouring libations out upon the ground
Of yellow honey; not then with unmixed blood
Of many bulls was ever an altar stained;
But among men 'twas sacrilege most vile
To reave of life and eat the goodly limbs.

The Sage

Was one among them there, a supreme man
Of vastest knowledge, gainer of large wealth
Of understanding, and chief master wise
Of diverse works of skill and wisdom all;
For whensoever he sought with scope and reach
Of understanding, then 'twas his to view
Readily each and every thing that e'er
In ten or twenty human ages throve.

Those Days

All things were tame, and gentle toward men.

The Divine

For since, O Muse undying, thou couldst deign
To give for these our paltry human cares
A gateway to thy soul, O now much more
Kalliope of the beautiful dear voice
Be near me now beseeching! — whilst I speak O well with him who
hath secured his wealth
Of thoughts divine, O wretchel! he whose care
Is shadowy speculation on the gods!
We may not bring It near us with our eyes
We may not grasp It with our human hands
With neither hands nor eyes, those highways twain
Whereby Belief drops into minds of men.
For 'tis adorned with never a manlike head.
For from Its back there swing no branching arms.
It hath no feet nor knees alert, nor form
Of tufted secret member; but It lives
And with swift thoughts darts through the universe.
But the wide law of all extends throughout
Broad-ruling ether and the vast white sky. Will ye not cease from this
great din o£ slaughter ?
Will ye not see, unthinking as ye are
How ye rend one another unbeknown?
The father lifteth for the stroke of death
His own dear son within a changed form.
And slits his throat for sacrifice with prayers —A blinded fool! But the
poor victims press
Imploring their destroyers. Yet not one
But still is deaf to piteous moan and wail.
Each slits the throat and in his halls prepares
A horrible repast. Thus too the son
Seizes the father, children the mother seize.
And reave of life and eath their own dear flesh. Drawing the soul as
water with the bronze.

Ah woe is me ! that never a pitiless day
Destroyed me long ago, ere yet my lips
Did meditate this feeding's monstrous crime! Withhold your hands from
leaves of Phoebus' tree ! Ye wretched, O ye altogether wretched
Your hands from beans withhold! Scooping from fountains five with
lasting bronze.
O fast from evil-doing.
Since wildered by your evil-doings huge
Ne'er shall ye free your life from heavy pains.

The Progression of Rebirth

And seers at last, and singers of high hymns
Shall they become, whence germinate the gods.
The excellent in honors.
At hearth Last Echoes of a Song Half Lost

The blood-full liver

Evening, the day's old age.
The belly.
In seven times seven days.