LIBRA:

THE ETERNAL BALANCE OF GOOD AND ILL.

I.

FROM everlasting is the Universe,
And unto everlasting shall extend;
Without beginning is it; without end
Its morrows ever yesterdays rehearse;
Not first nor last but only midst it knows;
As never young, so never old it grows.

II.

Yet is the secret of its permanence
Not rest but striving, not a dead repose,
No peace of mutually slaughtered foes,
Nor truce of wearied, but a strife intense,
Deathless, of powers that charge and countercharge
Ever, yet never may their bounds enlarge.

III.

Not progress is the secret of the sky,
And not decay the withering doom of earth;
Though, out of star-mist, systems round to birth,
And a dead moon mirrors earth's destiny,
The star shall sink in darkness whence it came,
And earth's grim desert be reborn in flame.

IV.

It is the wave with endless rise and fall,

It is the tide with ceaseless ebb and flow,
The changing moons, the hours with gloom and glow,
That hold the mystery of each and all,—
The rhythmic secret, wherein man has part
Even from the first pulsation of his heart.

V.

The pendulum with its untiring swing
Not only metes out time, but it reveals,
Babbling, the word eternity conceals,
Though to men deaf with their own questioning;
The lilting ripple of the poet's song
Itself contains the clue he sought life-long.

VI.

Nothing can be unfolded but has first
Been folded in, and shall be so again;
Nor yet can aught in equipoise remain,
But ever driveth toward the best or worst;
Nature keeps neither full nor empty cup,
And the half-filled she drains or fills it up.

VII.

Yet what had no beginning always is
And never can become; no inward change,
However wide its outward motions range,
Can touch its heart; despite man's fantasies,
The Universe exists, not merely seems
An everlasting see-saw of extremes.

VIII.

These two extremes man knows as More and Less,
As Good and Ill, lastly as Right and Wrong;
Feels them as Love or Hate his pulses throng;

Sees them with Beauty clothed or Ugliness,
And names them from their power to bless or ban
God and Devil, Ormuzd and Ahriman.

IX.

The righteous Paul lamented in his heart
The Good by Evil thwarted. So in thine
The False and True, the Cruel and Benign,
The Pure and Impure make thee what thou art
And what the All is: tiger, dove, and man,
Seraph and fiend, are fashioned on one plan.

X.

Even as the Universe, mid seeming change,
Really is locked in iron permanence,
So, everywhere, despite our cheated sense;
From one self-nature may it never range:
One is it, one in body and the soul,
And every part is parcel of the whole.

XI.

Behind all forces hides the primal Force,
The Unconditioned, which is bad and good
Impartially, and its divided mood
The single spirit of the Universe,
Of you and me and all men and the earth
And all the worlds Infinity wheels forth.

XII.

But mortal life displays not one but two,
Shows Good all-perfect warring against Ill,
Which yet abides unconquerable still,
And in this duel sets for man a part,
And teaches he must choose the side of Good.
Or rank below the cleft, insensate wood.

XIII.

Had it been destined to be otherwise,
Long since it would have been so; nay, for we
Deal not with time but with eternity,
It would have been so always; had our skies
Been fated to o'erarch a perfect earth,
They would have overarched it from their birth.

XIV.

This is the revelation; this alone
Rained ever from the Milky Way adown.
Or flamed from Vega and the Northern Crown,
Even this that written on my heart I own.
Not ours to ask if unto me or you
The word be welcome, but if it be true.

XV.

What then must be the Universe, ideal?
Never and nowhere; but endurable,
A place where on the whole 'tis fairly well,
Where at least men can live; in short, the real.
Had it been more, there were no need to ask;
Had it been less, not ours had been the task.

XVI.

If this be true, as Life forbids to doubt,
Is low then one with high, is conscience vain?
Forever no! But, though I shall not gain
After short strife a glorious mustering out,
My privilege more glorious is to be
A soldier of the Right eternally.

XVII.

Yet what avails my battle for the Right,

You ask, if through eternity shall still
Be kept the balance between Good and Ill?
Me much avails it, for 'tis mine to fight
On the Lord's side, being birthmarked with his seal;
My joy, my life is in that battle peal.

XVIII.

More can I ask? Shall some far eon see
The Evil quelled, the Good supreme prevail?
Not if our world have told us a true tale.
But can we hear and judge it rightfully?
Our torch is feeble; but at least its light
Reveals us friend and foeman in the fight.

XIX.

The rest is God's. Yet who would change that could
Doom so divine, which loftiest souls must bear,
Though archangelic?—in all worlds to share
The warfare of the soldiers of the Good,
Though marching under orders ever sealed,
And battling ever on a doubtful field!

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PROVIDENCE, R. I.