

*An ESSAY on the FIRST BOOK
of T. LUCRETIUS CARUS*

DE RERUM NATURA

Interpreted and made English Verse
by John Evelyn, Esq. (1656)

...For I of Gods and Heaven will discourse,
And shew whence all things else derive their source,
Whence Nature doth create, augment, & cherish,
To what again resolve them when they perish.
What things in our discourse we Matter call,
Prolifque bodies, and the seeds of all,
Of if such terms do not the things comprise,
Prime bodies name them, whence all other rise.
Gods in their nature of themselves subsist
'Tis certain, nor may ought their peace molest
For ever, unconcern'd with our affairs
And far remote, void of or grief or cares,
Need not our service, swim in full content,
Nor our good works accept, nor bad resent.

Whilst sometimes human life dejected lay
On earth, under gross superstitions sway,
Whose head aloft from heaven seem'd t' appear
And mankind with its horrid shape did scare,
With mortal eyes to look on her that durst
Or contradict; a Grecian was the first;
Him nor the fame of gods, nor lightnings flash,
Nor threatning bruit of thundring Skies could dash,
But rather did his courage elevate,
Natures remotest doors to penetrate;
Thus did he with his vigorous wit transpierce
The flaming limits of the Universe.
All that was great his generous soul had view'd,
Whence what could be produc'd, what not be shew'd
And how each finite thing hath bounds, nor may
By any means form her fixt limits, stray:
Wherefore fon Superstition trampled lies
Beneath, we rear our Trophies to the Skies.

...Dark fears of mind, then banish quite away,
Not with the Sun-beams, or the light of day,
But by such species, as from Nature flow,
And what from right informed reason grow;
Which unto us this principle doth frame,
That Out of nothing, nothing ever came.

'Tis onely thus, that men are aw'd with fear,
Because such things in Heaven and Earth appear,
Of which, since they a reason cannot find
To a celestial Author they're assign'd.
But when we find that nought of nought can be,
What we pursue, we shall more clearly see,
And shew, whence all things first produced were,
And yet the gods still unconcerned are;
For, if of Nothing form'd, no use of Seed,

Since every sort would from all things proceed.
Men from the liquid Seas might then arise,
Fishes & Fowl, from Earth, Beasts form the Skies,
And other Cattel; Bruits uncertain birth
Would fill the waste, & cultivated earth.
Nor Could from the same trees the same fruit spring
But all would change, & all things all would bring.

...Of Nothing then Nothing we must conclude
Results, but each thing is with seed indu'de,
From which all that's created comes to light
And clearly manifest themselves to sight.

...Add unto this, Nature to their first state
Doth all dissolve, nothing annihilate,
For if in all parts any thing could fail,
Death over all things would in time prevail;
Nor needed there a force to discompose
Their parts, or their strict union unloose:
But since in all eternal Seeds reside,
Till such a blow it meets, which it divides
Or else dissolves by subtle Penetrat'ion,
Nature preserves it whole form dissipation.
Beside those things remov'd by ages past,
If time did kill, and all their matter waste
Whence doth sweet Venus give to souls new birth
Through all their kinds? how should the various earth
Augment each kind with proper diet fed?
Whence flow the Seas? whence have free Springs their head?
Whence do the far extended Rivers rise?
And Stars, how are they nourish'd in the Skies?
Since length of times, and daies so many past,
All mortal bodies had ere this defac'd.
If then from that large tract, ought hath remain'd
From whence the sum of things has been maintain'd
Sure an immortal nature doth inspire
Them, nor can any thing to nought retire:
All from like force and cause dissolv'd would be,
Did not eternal matter keep it free:
And more or less them to their subjects bind,
One touch to them a cause of death they'd find
Had bodies no eternal permanence,
They would dissolve with the least violence:
But since the various bands of causes are
(Through matter permanent) dissimilar,
Bodies of things are safe 'till they receive
A force which may their proper thread unweave,
Nought then returns to nought, but parted fall
To Bodies of their prime Originals.

...Then nothing sure its being quite forsakes,
Since Nature one thing, from another makes;
Nor is there ought indeed which she supplies
Without the aid of something else that dies.
Since then I teach that nought of nothing breeds,
Or once produc'd to nought again recedes,
Lest yet thou shouldst my Arguments disside
Because that Elements can not be spi'd
By humane eyes; behold what bodies now

In things thou canst not see, yet must allow:
First, mighty Winds, the rolling Seas incite,
Huge Vessels Wrack, and put the clouds to flight;
And with their tearing blasts high mountains shake.
The seas likewise in thind'ring billows rise
And with their raging murmur threat the Skies.
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In things thou canst not see, yet must allow:
First, mighty Winds, the rolling Seas incite,
Huge Vessels Wrack, and put the clouds to flight;
Rushing through fields, sometimes tall trees they crack;
And with their tearing blasts high mountains shake.
The Seas likewise in thund'ring billows rise
And with their raging murmur threat the Skies.
Winds therefore unseen bodies are, which sweep
The fleeting clouds, the Earth, the Azure deep,
Bearing with sudden storm all things away,
Yet thus proceeding, do they nought destroy
Other than as the yeelding water flowes,
Augmented by large showers, or melted snows
Wch from deep clifts in Cataracts descend,
Whole trees they float, and prostrate woods they rend:
Nor can strong bridges their approach sustain,
Whose rapid torrent do's all check disdain.
The River with immoderate showres repleat,

Against their Piles impetuously does beat:
Roaring it ruins, huge stones along it rolles,
All things it spoyles, and nothing it controles.
Even so the gusts of sturdy winds do tend
Like swiftest Rivers when they downwards bend,
And carrie all before with double might,
Sometimes they snatch, and hurry things upright
In rapid whirle. Therefore I add agen
The Winds are Bodies, and yet are not seen.
Since their effects and motions every where
Like Rivers be, whose bodies do appear.
Besides, of things we smel the various sents,
Which yet no substance to our sight presents;
We with our eyes see neither Heat nor Cold,
Nor can we any Voyces found behold
Which of Corporeal nature yet consist,
For they the Sense affect `tis manifest.
Touch and be touch't, nought save a body may:
Cloaths become moist, wch we on shoars display;
Spread in the Sun, again, thy dry appear:
But neither how that humour entred there
Can we perceive: nor by what means it flies
The heat so soon, and consequently dries.
Therefore that which is humid separates
By minute parts, which no eye penetrates.
Thus at the bare return of sundry years
The Ring which one upon his finger wears
Diminisheth: Drops which do oft distill,
Hollow hard stones; And whilst the field we till,
The Coulter of the Plough is lessened:
And paved ways, whereon the people tread
Wear out we see: Brass Statues at our gates
Shew their right hand, wch frequent touch abates
Of such as visit oft, or pass the way;
Therefore things often worn the more decay:
But in each time, what bodies do discar'd
Is a fine sight from our gross eye debar'd;
Lastly, what Nature by minute degrees
And time applies, our sharpest eye-sight flees;
Nor what through age or leanness do's decay,
Nor what from rocks at Sea time wears away
With gnawing salt consum'd, do we espy:
Nature with bodies then unseen to th' eye
All things doth manage; not that I suppose
Nature with Bodies do's each thing inclose
On every side, for there's a Voyd in things
Which rightly to conceive, much profit brings.