

The grey-haired soldier porter waves me on,
 A tragic meanness seems so to environ
 And so on I crawl, and still my spirits fall:
 These corridors and stairs of stone and iron
 Cold, naked, clean—half workhouse and half jail.

So to the surgical out-patient room for examination:—

Here, on a bench a skeleton would writhe from . . .
 Angry and sore I wait to be admitted
 Wait till my heart is lead upon my stomach
 While at their ease two dressers do their chores.

One has a probe—it feels to me a crowbar—
 A small boy sniffs and shudders after blue-stone
 A poor old tramp explains his poor old ulcers.
 Life is (I think) a blunder and a shame.

He is admitted and lies first in the main surgical ward, with its
 “gaunt brown walls” looking “infinite.”

The atmosphere
 Suggests the trail of a ghostly druggist,
 Dressings and lint on the long, lean table.
 Whom are they for?
 The patients yawn
 Or lie as in training for shroud and coffin
 A nurse in the corridor scolds and wrangles
 It's grim and strange.

Oh, a gruesome world!

The limb has to be operated upon and we have the sonnet—“Before.”

Behold me waiting—waiting for the knife.
 A little while, and at a leap I storm
 The thick, sweet mystery of chloroform,
 The drunken dark, the little death-in-life,
 The gods are good to me: I have no wife,
 No innocent child, to think of as I near
 The fateful minute: nothing all too dear
 Unmans me for my bout of passive strife.
 Yet am I tremulous and a trifle sick
 And face to face with chance, I shrink a little
 My hopes are strong, my will is something weak . . .

So to the operating table:—

Then they bid you close your eyelids
 And they mask you with a napkin,
 And the anæsthetic reaches
 Hot and subtle through your being.

And you gasp and reel and shudder
 In a rushing swaying rapture
 While the voices at your elbow
 Fade — receding — fainter — fainter

And you wrestle, blind and dizzy
 In an agony of effort

Till a sudden lull accepts you,
 And you sound an utter darkness . . .
 And awaken . . . with a struggle . . .
 On a hushed, attentive audience.