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ER OF PAMPHYLIA
AND OTHER POEMS

ER OF PAMPHYLIA

AND

OTHER POEMS

BY

EDWARD HENRY PEMBER



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ER OF PAMPHYLIA

IN

FOUR CANTOS

*Ἦκω νεκρῶν κευθμῶνα καὶ σκότου πύλας
Λιπῶν*

ER OF PAMPHYLIA

CANTO I

I HAD been musing on that antique Myth
Wherein great Plato, fain to justify
Man's hope of immortality to man,
From the frail raft of proof and argument
Took refuge at the last; as who might say,
I who have spurned outworn Authority,
And leaned upon Philosophy alone,
Am baffled here; yet, for my parting gift,
Take ye this tale; I tell it with a smile
Akin to tears, and telling, do but bid
The good man hope on, and the bad beware.

Then flew my thoughts to that stern Florentine
Who wrought the Comedy well called Divine,
That Epic of the Afterworld, triune
As was the Godhead whom his Church revealed,
Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, one Universe,

Vengeance, and Pardon, and Beatitude,
Three Mysteries, like three Persons, blent in one.

And in self-commune said my heart to me,
“Under which captain of these mighty Twain
Take we our station? Shall we range ourselves
With those blind heirs of ignorance who make
Pronouncement of th’ unknown for known, content
To shiver in a serfdom of the soul?

Or his majestic sadness choose, who sighs
‘I know not, nor can ye, yet hope ye still?’”
I answered, “Let us lean to him whose faith
Is of his own soul’s fashioning, stands forth
Confessed for hope alone, and shines with light
Engendered from within, no borrowed rays
Cast from the spent discs of expiring suns.”
So, once our homage joint to Plato sealed,
On his last fable laying reverent hands,
As some strayed weaver, lost on Helicon,
In cave or mountain glade might light upon
A golden bowl of her choice handiwork
Lying beside Urania’s spinning-wheel,
And blameless use it for his need, I made
My votary’s prize of Academic store,
And wove its threads of legend into this:

Er of Lyrnessus in Pamphylia,
Young, beautiful, the sole and worthy son
Born to Armenius, who traced his line
Far back through treasured centuries to him
Who sailed to Colchis for the famous fleece
With Jason and his brother Argonauts,
In some chance battle between neighbour states
Was left for dead among a field of slain ;
Nor was it till ten summer days had gone,
And all the foreign host had left the land,
That they for whom he died dared venture forth
To gather home their wounded and their dead.
Him did they find outstretched, alone, supine,
Fronting the Heavens just as he fell, not marred
By sword thrust or the rip of heavy spear,
Nor changed like all the carrion forms around,
But fresh and dewy still with damps of death,
As 'twere a flower new-plucked. Foremost of all
They bore him, smitten with a nameless awe,
Across the scarred and trodden harvest fields,
And through their city gates, and laid him down,
Still wondering, within his father's hall.

There, cleansed from stains of battle, perfumed,
robed,

By tender hands of women did he lie,
Bloodless and cold, beyond all seeming dead,
But with that virgin freshness still on him;
Till someone said, 'We must not keep his shade
Expectant longer by the pallid stream,
Pining for burial;' and so they reared
His stately pyre beyond the city gate,
Hard by the shore, and laid him thereupon,
Setting due guard; and leaving moon and stars
To bathe his brows, closed eyelids, and set cheeks,
With loving ministrations of the Night.

At sunrise came again a mournful crowd
With wine, and spice, and wealth of torches lit
From sacred temple-fires; but ere their Priest
Could make a mute sign that his acolytes
Should lay their torch flames to the fragrant cones
Beneath the pyre, the dead man slowly rose;
And, leaning on one arm, the while his eyes
Began to give new answer to the Sun,
And over lip and cheek the rose of life
Spread blushing like the dawn on mountain snows,
First, with a gentle semblance of rebuke
He stayed the score of ready hands outstretched
To lift him from the bier; clearer than speech

His gesture said, 'All human things to me
Are shades of a dead past; though here awhile,
I am not now your fellow, touch me not;'
Then, rid of the one hazard that he feared,
That contact which no longer was of kind,
Calm mid the general tremor, thus he spake:

“ Good folk of fair Lyrnessus by the sea,
My brethren, and my kinsmen, glad am I
That, by the grace of those who sent me here,
I am allowed to look on you once more.
And you, ye borders of the fruitful Earth,
And thou, with these white fringes of thy sands,
And whiter ringlets of thy restless foam,
Thou, ever dancing, ever laughing sea,
Right happy are mine eyes for this brief space
Accorded them and me; let me bless all,
As summer blesses, ere, my mission done,
I go once more, no more to make return.

“ Friends, I was slain indeed, I know not how;
I neither saw the hand, nor felt the stroke
That slew me; or perchance, the shortlived pain
Had passed, e'en with the moment of its birth.
For even while Death came and went, I seemed

To find myself upon a journey, one
Of a great company, with whom I soon
Had reached a goal immeasurably far;
Though vain it seemeth thus to speak of time,
Distance, and space, where all these, as I think,
Are nought but recollections bred in us
Of this brief life, rounded by birth and death,
And little changes of our nights and days,
Our toils, our rests, our vigils, and our sleep;
And revolutions of the rapid Moon,
And slower movement of yon statelier Sun;
With seasons in their never varying course,
Spring, Summer, Winter, and soon Spring once
more,
And through them all our growth and our decay.

“We lay, methought, expectant in a Mead
That stretched ’twixt Earth and Heaven, expanding
vast

But featureless, thick-thronged with groups who
moved

This way and that; through these I looked, and saw
Where Judges sat enthroned, with ministers
Who haled all comers to their judgment-seats.
Then unto me, as I drew near, was brought

This mandate; 'Look, and harken thou; to thee
It is ordained that thou return to Earth,
When thou hast seen and heard unto the full
All that it is thy mission to record;
Nought else hast thou to do with us; for this
Thou art the chosen vessel of the Gods.'

"I heard, and, hearing, went apart, and watched:
As some late fisher on a lonely mere,
Lonely himself, beneath the winter moon,
Rocks in his boat among his nets, and marks
Skein after skein of wild-fowl taking wing,
Unscared, but yielding to a heart-felt force
That bids them hail the moment come, to seek,
Safe under gentle wardship of the Night,
Their breeding grounds a hundred leagues away;
Or, as some pale sequestered priest, whose kin,
For freedom's sake perchance, go forth to find
New homes and brothers' welcome over sea;
He, by his God withheld, and priestly vow,
Stands silent on the Temple steps, and sees
The crowd, and hears their tumult from afar,
The songs, the shouts, and from his heart and eyes
Pays his lone tribute to the women's tears
And human passion that he may not share;

So I, a watcher and a marveller,
A gazer on unshared futurity,
New-made the mouthpiece of the mighty Gods,
And by their mission sundered, stood alone.

CANTO II

“THE crowds with impotent reluctance pressed
Those dreaded chairs, like leaves, without
a will,

By autumn winds, resistless but unseen,
Blown to a fence; I noted each in turn
Take sentence, some with wailings of despair,
More with dismay, but many more with joy;
And as each turned away I saw on each
His judgment sealed.

“Two fissures vast were there
That opened into Earth; one access gave
Deep down to Tartarus, and thitherward,
Lamenting loud, a long procession streamed
Of souls condemned; hard by, the other gap
Disgorged at whiles fresh groups of happier ones
Who by compensatory pains had earned
A late release; a thousand years had passed
Since last they looked upon the light, and drank
A welcome draught of the sweet upper air;

Their empyrean brightness faintly showed
In fathomless azure poised; then marked I where
Through the vast void into that infinite,
From Earth two causeways rose, like sunbeams,
 broad,

Spanning the aether; long my baffled eyes
Pursued their paths in vain, though, ne'er the less,
They clomb until they reached their goal, twin
 Gates

Carved in the foot of the Celestial Wall.
Upward, by one of these, the happy bands
Of souls adjudged to bliss found easy way;
While down the other moved, less joyously,
But well-content with fate, an equal troop
Of those whose sojourn in beatitude
Was spent; no wayward sign, in sigh, or tear,
Or murmur, smirched the merit of their calm;
Sedate, serene, obedient to known law—
Their thousand years of virtue's wage fulfilled—
They came to reassume mortality,
And bear once more their burden in the world.

“The Meadow reached, these mingled with the
 throng
New-risen out of Hell, and greetings passed

From mouth to mouth, and tales were told of
Heaven,

In gladsome recollection, while the pains
And sorrows of the nether gloom called up
The tears of sadder memories into eyes
That fain had kept themselves all bright to quaff
The pleasure-cup of beauty newly filled;
And checked the happy beat of hearts that yearned
To clasp their liberty once more; and closed
Lips that but sought to ope that they might draw
The-long lost perfumes of the wholesome air.
But soon there fell on all a common calm,
And cheerful bands went sauntering here and there,
And sat, or lay, as fancy prompted them,
Unchallenged, to consume the restful hours.

“Seven days they lingered thus, but on the eighth
A summons came—nor voice nor trumpet blast
I heard—unheralded and unproclaimed,
It swept through all their scattered companies,
As on still summer days the scent of flowers,
Without one whisper of impulsive wind,
Usurps the air above the conscious lawns.
All rose obedient, with an instinct tuned
To the same chord within; along that Mead

That neither was of Earth nor Heaven, they made
A three days' march, till on the fourth they came
Where in their front shone out a shaft of light
Excelling far, in brilliance as in hues,
The splendour of a rainbow; wide it spread
O'er the terrestrial and celestial poles
And intervening spaces; one more day
Brought them beneath its arc; then were they 'ware
That both its flaming terminals were bound
By golden chains to th' empyrean sky.
For this it is that loops the outer vault
Of that which doth contain both Earth and Heaven;
As hawsers, that are stretched to undergird
A battle-ship, hold firm its straining sides,
So doth this gleaming girdle, whose embrace
More potent is than bands of bronze, or brass,
Or all enduring adamant, clasp and stay
The frame of our revolving Universe.

“Welded to its extremities is fixed
The Distaff of Necessity, whereto
Are all the Starry motions timed and tuned.
Its beam stupendous is of tempered steel;
Eight whorls, divinely fitted, each in each
And rising, one o'er other, like a cone,

Gird it about; their rims, with variant lights
Distinguished, gleam; and as it spins around,
Unchangeably do these their orbits hold
In circles independent, as the stars,
The Sun, the Moon and the Five Planets, theirs
Keep freely through the boundless fields of Heaven.

“ Upon the knees of great Necessity,
Whom Gods and Men and all things else obey,
True poised, the Distaff turns; on every whorl
A Siren sits and sings her single note
Through all its orbit, and their quire gives forth
That elemental and consorted sound,
That mighty Diapason, named of men,
Whom dreams have taught, the Harmony of the
Spheres.

“ Around their Mother's throne, o'er all things
else
Save her supreme, on lower couches sit
Those three dread daughters of Necessity
Whom men have called The Fates, and given them
names,
Clotho, and Lachesis, and Atropos;
Clad in white robes are they, and all their heads
Are garlanded, and, as they sit, they sing

In answer to the Sirens; Lachesis
Of all that has been, Clotho of what is,
And Atropos of what has not been yet,
But yet shall be; each one a hand betimes
Lays on the whorls that may not flag, the while
The Sirens' song and theirs, unceasing, keep
The rhythm that must be kept for ever more.

CANTO III

“**H**IGH in their midst, among the group of
 thrones,

Hard by the chair of Lachesis, there rose

A solitary Mound, in semblance like

The pulpit of a Herald; thitherward,

And marshalled in unconscious order, drew

The congregation of expectant Souls.

Then on the summit of the Mound appeared

A form majestic, of true human shape,

But one to whom the tallest of tall kings,

Of whom their Sons—our grandsires—and their

Bards

Have told and sung, had but as Pigmies shown;

He, glancing round, in tones austere and large,

Well heard of all, thus, without prelude, spake:

‘By me to you, ye shortlived spirits, saith

Lachesis, Daughter of Necessity;

Hence, at this point of what ye know as Time,

Ye must return to Earth, and there renew

The course of your mortality; to live,
And, having lived, to die, and dying, reap,
As ye have reaped, in suffering or in joy,
All that shall then be due; his destiny
Each one is free to choose, and in his choice
His hazard lies of future good or ill;
The Gods are guiltless; come ye, and choose well.
Before each lies a lot which shall declare
His order of approach; this Chance doth sway;
Yet let not him who finds himself the first
Exult, nor him who cometh last despond.'

“So spake that towering Shape, and as he ceased,
Like snowflakes lighted by the level sun,
On some still winter afternoon, there fell
Showers of white Tablets; at the shadowy feet
Of that vast unsubstantial crowd they lay;
And straightway, by one impulse mutely stirred,
Its slender cohorts bent, as bend the lines
Of cornstalks in a wind; each took the lot
That fell to him; and, one by one, all passed,
Reformed in a long line, to where they saw
Outspread in multitudinous array
The Destinies their duty was to choose.

No forms of life were lacking, bird or beast,
Of wild or tame, of male or feminine,
Fish, reptile, monsters of the land or sea,
Tree, shrub, or humbler floweret of the vale
Or mountain, with unnumbered human fates
Alone sufficing for bewilderment;
Brief sovereignties were there, that found their end
In beggary or exile, others built
On thrones secure, but with some term attached
To make a wise man pause; love, beauty, fame,
Health, poverty, disease, wealth, all were there;
The warrior's glory, with the gymnast's; last,
Rarest among them all, and hard to find,
The gift divine of fateful poesy;
But all alike compounded and alloyed
With such distempering perplexities
As made doubt wisdom.

“Well was it with me
That I might stand alone, withdrawn, and freed
From all temptation to untoward desire.
For One I saw stand forth, and, with scant glance,
And hand unhesitating, rashly seize
The promise of a Tyranny; alas,
He wot not that a doom therewith was writ

That, as old Kronos, whom Zeus overset,
Devoured his offspring, so its chooser should
Slay, smit with jealous fears, his only son.
Too late he wailed, and clutched with savage
hands

His blameless beard, flinging forth curses wide
On fortune, fate, and all things, save himself
And his blind will; one of those souls was he
Whom I had watched descending out of Heaven;
One who of slender merit had achieved
His thousand years of bliss; his parentage,
The training of his youth, his manhood fenced
In the safe ward of a well-ordered State,
Had clad him in a pallid blamelessness,
That was as virtue's robe when he was judged.
In this sole moment his frail nature first
Unaided stood, and in that moment fell.
Nor fell he singly; many another came
Who had reached Heaven without the chastening
aid

Of stern Philosophy, and, e'en as he,
Had made their sojourn in celestial joy
As idle as their fruitless years on Earth;
But they who rose from out the dolorous realms,

Whom fire had tried, and misery had made wise
Chose wisely, and exchanged ill fates for good,
As those good fates for ill.

“ And some there were
Whose choice, so strange in its conceit, had moved
My laughter, had not sadness on my lips
Laid her rebuking hand ; for there I saw
Orpheus, still loving music, while he loathed
That race of women who had slaughtered him,
So that he would be born anew of none,
Take up a Swan’s fate, minding at his ease
To end a tuneless life in tuneful death ;
And Thamyris whom the outraged Muses struck
With blindness and forgetfulness of song,
Chose as a Nightingale a haven safe
From rash ambition and revenge divine ;
Thersites, apelike still, became an Ape ;
Swift Atalanta, harbouring in her heart
Vexation for her girlish fancy caught
By Aphrodite’s apples, that lost race,
Melanion’s triumph, her wrecked maidenhood,
And th’ easy smiles of her uncaring Sire,
Once more would be a Gymnast, but a Man ;
And Ajax, his distemper unassuaged

From his old covet of Pelides' arms,
Still raving, at a madman's odds with man,
Pounced with a roar upon a Lion's form ;
While Agamemnon, haughtier than at Troy,
And mindful of his murderous welcome home,
Thought to look down from solitary heights
On human treacheries, and so preferred
An Eagle's eyrie to a second throne.
And many a Soul I saw of bird and beast,
Spurred by ambition, eagerly seek out
Some form of our man's life, and stalk aside
Ruffling with pride, like children o'er a gift
Of some new puppet.

“ At the end there came
Godlike Odysseus, wisest when on Earth,
And wiser now ; so chanced it, he had drawn
The latest number ; long he went about,
Sad, cautious, pondering slow the myriad fates
That lay unclaimed, till, well content, he found
One which a thousand hands had cast aside,
Promising home, and undisturbed repose,
With cheerful wife and laughing children dowered,
And a mind lighted by the guiding lamps
Of virtue and serene philosophy.

He chose it, and with meditative eyes
That neither told of sorrow nor of joy,
But rather of a soul well schooled by fortune,
He turned to follow the retiring bands.

CANTO IV

“ **S**UCH changes in the general rush of change
My growing wonder and compassion stirred ;
Might, meanness, just and unjust, human, brute,
Kingship, rusticity, the minstrel’s harp,
The warrior’s spear, obscurity, and fame,
Surrendered, seized, but all confused and strange ;
Peril, exultant, clapped her noiseless wings,
And smiled her baleful smile unseen, to see
Mad-cap Desire at war with sober Doubt,
Haste vanquishing Good Counsel with a sneer,
And Folly shouldering Wisdom everywhere.

“ Once more in order trooped they to the chair
Of Lachesis, who sang her Siren chaunt
Unmoved, while she assigned to each a guide
And guardian, who should bear him on his way
To the new life, and make his choice secure.
These led their charges under Clotho’s arm,
And ’neath the whirling motion of the whorls,
And thence to where the spinster Atropos

Sat, who bade all to pass before the throne
Of her whom e'en these sisters three obey,
And Gods and men, supreme Necessity:
So was their choice made irreversible,
And doom self-chosen beyond redemption sealed.

“Soon all had passed—and I had followed
them—

To take their way over an arid plain,
Called of Forgetfulness, where no tree grew,
Nor shade was there, nor mitigating wind,
But all the soil was bleached and burned with heat
Unbearable; all day we journeyed on,
While deeper still and deeper, with the hours,
Their silence grew; till at the last no sound
Of wailing, exultation, or content,
Rose from their listless ranks; they moved as men
In whom the mind is dead, and hope, and fear,
And memory, with all thought of outward things,
Who neither wake, nor sleep, nor dream, but move
Like cattle over sands where no food is.

“So o'er these plains, well styled, they mutely
went,

Until at fall of evening, we drew near
The brink of a slow river, named for me

Th' Unmindful Stream; no vessel dipped therein
Comes up the fuller, such a property
Have its elusive waters that they brook
Nor capture nor restraint, but straight flow back
Rebellious; only herded souls like those,
Whose fate it is, may drink thereof, and they
Must take their measure from the mother flood.

“These then, by overmastering instinct swayed,
Bent down, perforce, and drank; some overmuch,
From thirst engendered of their drouthy march;
On them a swift oblivion of things past
Fell absolute, while such as wisely held
Their craving, like unbroken hounds, in leash,
And only drank submissive to the law,
Took back with them to Earth that blessed gift—
Albeit but dim and in rare moments felt—
Of Recollection, from the glistening realms
Where all the Substances of Truth and Life
And Nature, in perfection unassailed,
Whereof this world of ours hath but the show
And shadow, are laid up for evermore.

“So drew we to the hours that had been night,
Had this unlovely plain and voiceless stream
Been earthly; but they passed unchanging by,

While I sat pining for the moon and stars,
And all around and far that fated crowd
Lay in a common torpor steeped and dumb.
Upon my wakeful soul a sense of change
Had long lain heavy, growing to a dread
Of more than vastness born and solitude,
When, in a moment, while I mused, and thought
'Now it is midnight upon Earth, now rides
The full Moon in the radiant South, and mounts
With Saturn in her wake,' Lo, sudden peals
Louder than thunder, and long quaking throes,
Such as they feel, rending the tortured Earth,
Who stand upon those fierce Phlegraean plains
That breathe perpetual fumes of smoke and flame.
Staggering I gazed around; I was alone;
Nor crowd, nor warders; but the air was full
Of glinting sparks that flashed and fell in pairs,
As flash and fall those stars that throng at whiles
Our winter skies; but, even while I gazed,
All vanished, and I seemed myself to fade,
And know no more than this, that I am here."

He ceased, and slowly sinking on the couch
Lay with his face upturned; none spake to him;

The marvel of his mission and his tale,
And reverence for one whose chosen soul
Had looked on th' adamantine gates of Heaven,
Hedged him with splendour; 'twas as they had
seen

A living God stand at his temple doors;
An awe, surpassing worship, fell on them,
Holding them motionless and mute; but he,
Fainter, and paler unto whiteness grew;
One whispered word parted his lips, 'Farewell,'
And ere they closed again his soul had flown;
His eyes were fixed, his palms extended lay;
And all men knew that this was death indeed.

Oh ye, of all the mighty Dead wellnigh
The mightiest, the latchet of whose shoes
I am not worthy to unloose, forgive me,
That I have dared to light my puny lamp
At the far rays of that particular Star,
Which, for the gazer who uplifts his eyes
To feast them in the heavens of poesy,
With your associate splendour seems to shine.
Great Shades, I would not have you frown on me;
What I have done was done in reverence,

Not vanity, nor of presumptuous pride,
Like theirs of old, those braggart revellers,
Who, feasting in the Odyssean halls,
Essayed with impious and reckless hands
To bend the flouted Hero's fatal bow;
Nor his, that Chaldee monarch, who dared pour
Libations foul to Bel and Ashtaroth
From vessels hallowed at Jehovah's shrine.
On them swift vengeance and confusion fell,
And courted doom; not like to them, Great Shades,
Am I, who fain would have your pardon here;
No mocker I, but your true worshipper;
I do not lift the head, but bend the knee
On this the outer verge of your domain,
In loyalty, and lowliness, and love.

HOMMAGES

À CHARLES D'ORLEANS

THE Spring has wisely cast away
 Her weeds of cold and wind and rain,
 And now betakes herself again
 Unto the Sun for her array ;

No beast on mead or bird on spray
 But in their fashion swell the strain,
 The Spring has wisely cast away
 Her weeds of cold and wind and rain.

And fount and stream on bosoms gay
 Flaunt, as they flow by hill and plain,
 Their answer to the glad refrain
 In myriad gems of silver gray,
 The Spring has wisely cast away
 Her weeds of cold and wind and rain

À MARCELINE DESBORDES-
VALMORE

NAY, write no more, for I am sad, and fain
 To fade, like Eros with his torch outblown;
 Without thy light my summers are all gloom;
 Mine arms, that strove to clasp thy form in vain,
 Are closed; my heart is void as well as lone;
 To strike it now were but to strike a tomb:
 Nay, write no more!

Our lesson is to learn to die apart;
 But meanwhile ask of God and thine own soul,
 If in the past I have not worshipped thee;
 For me, I dare proclaim that through my heart
 Such echoes underneath thy silence roll
 As tell of Heavens where I shall never be:
 Nay, write no more!

Ah no! I fear thy letters as I fear
 My memory, which keeps thy voice's tone
 And lets it call me back despite my will;

Those characters, so well known and so dear,
Were springs to one athirst in mockery shown,
Or portraits drawn with life enough to kill:
Nay, write no more !

No more, no more! Not e'en that single word,
So sweet, which now I should not dare to see,
Which ne'er brake through the sparkle of thy
smiles;
But would take shape and sound, as if I heard
The deluge of thy voice engulfing me,
And even felt thy branding kiss at whiles:
Then, write no more !

À ALFRED DE MUSSET

FAREWELL! Fate calls thee only; here
 below

'Twere best that we should never meet again;
 For now that I am losing thee I know
 How thorough hath my love been and how vain.

No tears, no sighs! I pay the reverence
 Becoming to thy future and to mine;
 I hail the Bark that is to bear thee hence,
 And smile to see her sails affront the brine.

A cargo of rich hope she bears with thee,
 And freighted deep with pride will she return;
 But little meed for my lone misery,
 Forgotten, as I shall be, shall I earn.

Thou goest forth in thrall unto a dream,
 In quest of perilous joys; I see arise
 Above thy course a star whose baleful gleam
 Too long shall misdirect thy spell-bound eyes.

A day may dawn to teach thee truer things ;

How much is meant when spirits meet their kind,

How sphered a fulness their conjunction brings,

How deep a void their cleavage leaves behind.

À MONTENACKEN

BRIEF is Life's spell;
 We love awhile,
 We hate awhile;
 And say—'Farewell!'

Vain 'tis and slight;
 We hope awhile,
 We dream awhile;
 And then—'Good Night!

'Tis of such stuff
 As Fate doth make it,
 As such we take it,
 And—'tis enough.

À BRAGA

SERENADE

LOVE, leave me not, I pray thee do not
leave me!

Not for the pain of my lost love alone,
But that thy treason, shouldst thou thus deceive
me,
Would smirch the halo faith hath round thee
thrown.

'Tis in thine honour's suit that I implore thee,
Not in mine own, I swear it, not in mine;
I could love on, though ceasing to adore thee—
But what thy lapse to cease to be divine!
Ah, fall not thou; the stars would fall with thee,
And gemless Night mourn, unredeemed, in jet;
And Winter, to his iron will left free,
The Spring at all her porches would beset;
Night's lamps, Day's sun, Spring's resurrection, wait
From thine imperial lips their common fate.

À MOZART

CONCERTO IN G

SWEET floods of sound, far mightier than
speech,

Why have ye ceased to pour into my soul?

Ye plumbed a void no words could ever reach,

Why could ye not, sweet floods, for ever roll?

Your message was a volume measureless,

And I lay lapped as in mellifluous fire,

Surrendered to its conquering tenderness,

More vague than dream, and vaster than desire.

Ye called a truce 'twixt froward destiny

And me, who so long time had been at war;

I hailed the respite for eternity,

Yet soon, alas, all was as heretofore;

A hope ye draped, too sweet for mockery,

Though warrantless, of what might never be.

Ye faded and ye left me to my fast;

My long lone fast, too speedily renewed,

Boding a future leaner than the past,

And your chance feast was but an interlude.

I rate it none the less for being brief;

The rose doth not condemn her perished flower,

Nor the gaunt oak the memory of his leaf,

Nor I the fulness of that priceless hour.

Sweet sounds, I know that ye were born to die,

And leave the void ye plenished once more
bare;

I am all gratitude, I do but sigh

That what I garnered was as perfumed air

Which passeth, leaving naught save to have known

How moments may for barren days atone.

Music, thy bland deceptive ironies

Can oust pale grief from her inheritance,

As leathern discs from some lost Bedouin's eyes

Can blot the desert's pitiless expanse,

E'en though it be but for a little space;

The discs may tremble from his nerveless hands,

And give his tanned and sorely rifted face

Back to the torture of the burning sands;

But not the less, the while he held them there,

Saw he behind the shield of their frail shade,

In dreams each boon of an Oasis fair,
Date-palm and water-pool and grassy glade;
So I through sound, as 'neath that shadow he,
Won salvage from time's grounded argosy.

À PIERRE DE RONSARD

WHEN thou art old, and sittest in the
 gloaming

Hands folded, in the half-light of thy fire,
 And when, perchance, thy fancies may fly roaming

Back to the lost notes of a broken lyre,
 While he who touched it may have long lain sleeping

Far in his forest graveyard cased and bound,
 Where oak and elm their common watch are keeping

O'er him and poorer village-folk around;
 It may be thou shalt sigh, 'If he ne'er told me,

Was it that I myself would ne'er be told?
 If so, what did I suffer to withhold me?

Or was it his to speak or to withhold?
 Or his or mine, alone I live to say

Why did we fling life's latest rose away?'

RIPOSTE À RONSARD

WHEN I am gone, and thou hast long been
 living,
 Alone, upon thy forest-girdled hill,
 And memories, unforgetting, unforgiving,
 Cling to thee, like a poisoned mantle, still;
 And when that 'rose' too timorously cherished,
 From life's dead garden hath long disappeared,
 And search would show thee but how both have
 perished,
 The scents that drew us, and the thorns we
 feared;
 It may be thou shalt muse, and sigh in musing,
 'Too late! What would I now not give to know
 That which, unknown, is loss of mine own losing,
 And makes these years so barren and so slow;
 The fault was neither in her heart nor mine;
 Why did I let her pass, and make no sign?'

LYRICAL PIECES

LATE SPRING

ART thou not long in coming,
Oh Spring, my Spring?

Is it not time I heard
The beat of thy wing?

And found a tell-tale footprint,
Some Arum's frill,
Snowdrop, or Daphne bells,
Or shaft of Jonquil?

Was I not wont to win thee
Just for one day,
E'en if the angry winds
Forbade thee to stay?

Call on the West, thy comrade,
Bid him come forth,
Drive back thy chiding foe,
To howl to his North.

What if I know thy visits
Stolen and vain,
Until the last link snap
Of Winter's long chain,

Yet welcome be whenever
Thou canst break through ;
Sweet are blown kisses, though
Far sent and too few.

TWO VOICES

“À Dieu, pagniers, vendanges sont faictes.”
 MONTLUC, “Comedie de Proverbes.”

First Voice

SING no more, for the chestnuts are garnered,
 Ripe maize-bunches are red in the sun,
 Filled are the barns, and the vats overflowing;
 Lay by your baskets, the vintage is done.

Gone for awhile are the merry mornings,
 Hum of the noontide heard from the shade,
 Songs of the mid-day meal, and the laughter
 Loitering home along lane and glade.

Sigh no sighs, though the skirts of November
 Scantly border the lines of her noon,
 Welcome her, leading her wintry Sisters,
 Bearers of many a sober boon.

Turn to the pleasures of hearth and homestead,
 Brief days' toil in the field and the byre,

Thrice-told tales over loom and distaff;
Needles plied in the light of the fire.

Second Voice

Well may ye for whom life is keeping
Wealth in her summers and autumns yet,
Hopes of the seed time, joys of the harvest,
Turn to your winter with light regret!

What know ye of the mighty Reaper's
Sickle that scorneth a single year,
Faith's long failing, and love's long waning,
Chills that no hearth-fire's glow may cheer.

What unto you is the sum of the Winter?
Earlier eves and a lagging of dawns,
Heavier veils over sunrise and sundown,
Carpet of rime upon close-fed lawns;

Hearts there are unto whom her coming
Telleth anew of the joys that are gone,
Hearts that hear, with a pang for echo,
'Lay all by, for the vintage is done?'

NORTH AND SOUTH

LOCH HOURN, 1905

THOUGH o'er your wastes insatiate shadows
roll,

Ye dark lands beaten by the Northern Sea,
Ye make the joy of many a yearning soul,
And for their sakes should be a joy to me,

And though perchance to wrest a Southern lyre
To such wild measures as become the wild,
Were vainer than to seek for Comet fires
In Planets dowered with a radiance mild,

I might have sung you, ye gaunt solitudes,
As one who loved your menaces of doom,
And have made pastime of the death that broods
With shifting pinions in your mist and gloom;

But breaking on my thought, in mocking guise,
As though ye ne'er were aught but bland and gay,
Ye spread broad charms to the September skies,
Brighter than gardens pranked for holiday.

An eagle soars above yon high white cloud,
His path is mirrored in these waters clear,
Bold seagulls round our bows expectant crowd,
And couched among the bracken dream the deer.

There's scarce a colour lacking to the scene;
Young pines are blue above the golden fern,
The purple heather lingers, birks are green,
And scarlet rowan-bunches bask and burn;

Swart sycamores are flaring in the sun,
The chiselled quartz is gleaming like a gem,
White streamlets foam between their alders dun
Down to the thirsty lake that craves for them.

“Ah well, ah well, howe'er thou dost protest,”
Cries the pert Landscape, “I shall win thee yet;
These brows of mine, so delicately drest,
Are they not worthy thy love's coronet?”

“Accept me as I am; Content thee; See,
My moods but fret the surface of my sky;
There is a bond of kin 'twixt thee and me,
Thou hast more nights and days of gloom than I.

“Desirest thou a human love? Be sure

It waits thee somewhere in these Highland glades,
No Southern heart beats truer or more pure
Than the brave pulses of our Northern maids.”

Nay, nay, thou wayward child of change and chance,

I will not gaze again on thy false eyes,
Nor barter one sweet name's significance
For thee and thine untoward inconstancies.

Yet, wert thou not a wanton of the air,

No Northern pulses should set mine astir;
My heart is in the South, my Lady there;
So fare thee well, I go to it and Her.

ALOFT

A LOFT to his mate in the Aether
An eagle called on the wing;
A proud pine leaned to his consort,
And sang as their proudest sing;

Aloft in the halls of the sunset,
High over the shades of the wold,
Gold cloudlets beamed on the purple,
And they smiled back on the gold;

Aloft upon answering pinions
We rose, and we floated awhile,
Disdainful of earth and of all things
We frowned on as earthlike and vile;

One eagle has stooped to her eyrie,
There stands but one desolate pine,
The clouds are all gray in their gloaming,
And I am alone in mine.

BEHIND SILENCE

FROM multitudinous notes of Nature's Psalm,
There swells a ceaseless sound that underlies
The seeming silence of the deepest calm
That ever lulled the earth or steeped the skies;

No common outburst, like some human cry,
The solitary worker's song, or hail
From plough or waggon to a passer-by
Along the upland road that skirts his dale;

Nor like the emulous quire of nesting birds,
Or hum of the hive's plodding choristers,
Or bleat of lambs, or low of answering herds,
Or the wind's love-song in the silver firs;

These are the chords of a symphonic tone
Beyond the recognition of our sense,
Inaudible together, as alone,
But no less vast for our incompetence;

The careful forge of grass-blades stroke by stroke,
The tightening of her tendrils by the vine,
The scaling of the bark on secular oak,
And burst of resinous seams all up the pine;

The late snows as they melt from mountain crowns,
The glacier grinding at its granite bands,
E'en the slow crumbling of the placid downs,
And soft subsidence of the fresh-turned lands;

The timid spread of the furled lily's leaf,
The chip of the young linnet in its shell,
The corals working at their chambered reef,
The squirrel shaking off his winter spell;

Each yearn, each throb, of life, and growth, and
change,
Lends its own voice to swell one mystic whole,
A diapason of transcendent range,
Mute to man's ear, but music in his soul.

So looking on a hill-side in the haze,
'Tis through the vision of the mind alone

We reach the splendours of its compound blaze
From moss and herb, leaf, bloom, and sparkling
stone;

So too, the watcher of humanity
May of her plainer sounds the sharer be,
Her song, or sob, for joy or misery,
Her echo of great deeds o'er land and sea;

But who can catch the infant tones of truth,
Right's lispings, the low snarl of baffled wrong,
And whispered working-songs of love and ruth,
That make the marvel of her undersong?

COMET AND STAR

IN the seat of his desolate splendour
 A lone star planetless rolled,
 Around him the voids of the Aether
 Spread measureless, dark, and cold.

And he sighed in the sough of his tempests,
 As a king might sigh on his throne,
 At the fate that was his for ever
 To be poised in the heavens alone.

For the fires of his heart were idle,
 And barren his fountains of light,
 In the dearth of a planet's welcome
 From the deeps of the Aether night.

But he saw, as he sighed, in the darkness,
 Set faint 'mid a hazy zone,
 A speck, as of pallid silver,
 Whence rays flashed back to his own;

And the speck grew a portent of beauty,
 With a train of a million miles,
With robes, as the robes of a seraph,
 And beams, as a woman's smiles.

And, swifter and ever swifter
 She swept to the happy star,
And nearer and ever nearer,
 But ever a world too far ;

And stronger and ever stronger
 The spell by which each was drawn,
She straining as Dawn to the Noontide,
 He Noontide on fire for the Dawn.

He brightened the heart of the Comet
 With all that he had that was bright,
She lightened the lot of the lone Star
 With all that she had that was light.

Too brief was their sojourn together,
 She circled, and passed him again ;
The Star would have bartered his glories
 To touch but the hem of her train.

And he sighed out his heart as she left him,
 'Sweet Wayfarer, wherefore away?
Are not these Heavens enough for thee?
 O stay, fair Wanderer, stay!'

But she, without pause or token,
 Swept back into Aether the while,
And faint grew her robes of a seraph,
 And fainter her woman's smile.

He watched till she passed into darkness,
 A speck 'mid a hazy zone,
And left him to desolate splendour
 In his heaven, again graceless and lone.

Will she come in her silvery beauty,
 With her smile and her gleaming hair,
Once more through those voids of the Aether
 To the lone star waiting her there?

LOVE'S TESTAMENT

THINK not, my love, that I would have thee
fade

Because my bones are rotting underground,
Or have thy beauty's sunshine turn to shade
Reflected from the tomb where I lie bound;
Wear thou no weeds to match my winding-sheet,
Forego no graces for my graceless state,
Live on, forget me, let thy life be sweet,
'Tis not for it death's bitterness to mate;
Life is thy lord and thou within his power,
The treason of regret he counts a crime,
His office bearer to thy latest hour,
Thy duties are to live in tune with time;
Grow garden roses scentless or less gay
Though some who may have loved them pass
away?

RETIREMENT

A LITTLE Goldfinch sang to me
 ‘ Hedge grow bare and herbage fallow!
 What singing bird could happier be?
 No more pecking on the fallow!

‘ My heart is light, my cage is new,
 Hedge grow bare and herbage fallow!
 I’ve lots of seed and sugar too;
 No more pecking on the fallow!

‘ From perch to perch I hop and sing,
 Hedge grow bare and herbage fallow!
 And clean my beak and preen my wing;
 No more pecking on the fallow!

‘ I chirp through half the summer day,
 Hedge grew bare and herbage fallow!
 While on my bars the sunbeams play;
 No more pecking on the fallow!

‘ And when the winter firelight glows,
Hedge grow bare and herbage fallow!
I puff my breast and blink and doze;
No more pecking on the fallow!

‘ Time was I had to flit and push,
Hedge grow bare and herbage fallow!
Through grassy tuft or thorny bush;
No more pecking on the fallow!

‘ Half famished, and right glad to feed,
Hedge grow bare and herbage fallow!
On raw green bud or half ripe seed;
No more pecking on the fallow!

‘ And when the chill nights fell, to find,
Hedge grow bare and herbage fallow!
Some corner sheltered from the wind;
No more pecking on the fallow!

‘ Now droughty Summer, barren Spring,
Hedge grow bare and herbage fallow!
Or Winter drear no terrors bring;
No more pecking on the fallow!

'The circling months unmoved I see,
Hedge grow bare and herbage fallow!
All seasons are alike to me;
No more pecking on the fallow!'

IN A SHRUBBERY WALK

WINDS are blowing and rain is falling,
 What unto me are the winds and the rain!
 Perched on a pine-bough a Robin is calling,
 As he is wont, but he calleth in vain.

Call he will till a curve in the laurels
 Hides me out of his angry view;
 Robin and I have had many quarrels,
 Founded, I fear, on my folly for you.

Loftily chirrups he, "Why, why bring her?
 She is a veil between thee and us all;
 Here with thee, ever she bids thee sing her;
 Gone, she leaveth thee under a pall,

Dead unto all of us; oh, forget her,
 One slight woman for our sweet world;
 Is not the young year's coronal better?
 What are her plumes and her throat bepearled?"

Robin, oh Robin, I should not hear thee,
But for the fact that thy lady is there,
Quilted and warm in the ivy near thee
Making thee saucy and debonair.

Sing me a song with a touch of sadness,
So will I turn to thy calling again;
Bitter as pain is the gall of gladness
Poured upon hearts that are bitter with pain.

TRAGEDY

A POOR soul sat sighing, sighing, sadly sighed
she,

‘Ah would, ah would that slumber might come
unto me.’

A child was in the cradle she rocked with her
hand,

A little child lay sleeping there rosy and bland ;

But the poor soul kept sighing, sighing, sorely
sighed she,

‘Ah would to God that slumber might come unto
me.’

‘They have said that thy mother, child, was fair
as art thou,

But false thy father was to her, child, who watcheth
thee now.’

And again she fell sighing, sighing, sorely sighed
she,

‘Sleep on, and would such slumber could come
unto me.’

From the bed where they laid her she ne’er rose
again,

To tend her rival’s orphan and sigh out her pain;

For the poor soul lay dying, dying, gladly died she,
Saying, ‘Death, thou art the slumber God sends
unto me.’

MAK SICKER!

LANG stayed he 'neath her bower eaves,
 And lang he tirlit at the pin,
 Wi' Art thou there, O love of mine,
 Wilt thou no' rise and let me in?

Go, get thee back to whence ye cam',
 Thy Lady wife waits in thy ha',
 To her thy lifelong faith is sworn,
 To her and to her bairnies twa.

Though I be wed to an Earl's daughter,
 And nae kirk bond may bind us twain,
 I'll carry thee off, for weel I lo'e thee,
 And trow thou lo'est me weel again.

Na, na, young Lord, ye're nought to me,
 I tak' it ill that thou art come;
 I wad na' grant thee love for love
 For a' the gowd in Christendom:

My heart is wi' mine honour bound,
But gin it brast its bars for thee,
I would na' be fause to anither woman,
Nor gi'e ye a chance to lichtlie me.

I swear I wadna' lichtlie thee,
But love and cherish thee for aye;
So, Alice, come thou doun to me,
We'll be far off by break of day.

I'll speak nae word the mair, my Lord;
Sae swear nae oaths, but get thee hame;
I'm but a simple country maid
That hauds a' cheaper than her gude name.

For shame he bowed his comely head,
And turned and gat him doun the brae,
He loosed his steed frae the wood wicket,
And slowly rade on his homeward way.

To see him gane she greeted sair,
And clenched her hands, and cried, Alack!
Oh Mary, Mither o' God, befriend me,
Lest I rin doun and ca' him back!

Then counsel teuk her twa brithers,
Maun he no' dee, yon fu' fause chield?
He'll bye be tempting our ae' sister,
And shame were ours an' she suld yield.

Wi' haste they gat in the front o' him,
As he rade slowly through the wood;
They hewed the houghs of the gray palfrey,
And washed their knives in his rider's bluid.

Now what is this that dyes your hands,
And wha 's the red bluid on your knives,
And why wear ye the awesome looks
Of men in dread o' their ain lives?

Oh it is bluid of a gude gray steed
But and the bluid of his rider too;
We dursed na' spare to slay yon man
Lest he should gi'e thee cause to rue.

Sae gang and fetch the meat and wine,
And gi'e us joy o' our bluidy hands,
And say a prayer for thy twa brithers
Who flee this night into ither lands.

'Tis I will bring ye meat and wine,
And water to wash your bluidy hands,
And pray for ye, spite of a' ye've done,
Whiles ye are biding in ither lands.

Though ye hae slain a youth more gudely
Than your twa sels, ah, wae is me,
'Twas I that tauld him I did na lo'e him,
He gat his death frae my cruel lee.

Though life be bitter, and shame be heavy,
I wot his loss is waur than a'
That I had tholed, gin I had listened,
And let him carry me far awa.

But Mary, Mither, ye'll pardon me,
I ken na' what I wad say or feel;
For I am stricken to death, sweet Mither,
Nae less than he by my brithers' steel.

DEBITA FLACCO

DEBITA FLACCO

THE BORE

“Ibam forte Viâ Sacrâ”

HOR. Sat. I. 9.

AT 5.10 on the 23rd of June,
As is my custom of an afternoon,
A little weary, meditative, slow,
I strolled up Piccadilly towards the ‘Row.’
When suddenly, ere I had time to see
If Hell or any Club were near to me,
I found my arm pumphanded up and down
By One I think the greatest bore in town.
“My dear old chap,” the coarse-tongued idiot
cried—
I gulped this down, Heaven knows what I replied—
“How are you? Worked to death? We all are. Ay?
I never get a moment in the day!
I seldom meet you now; like me, no doubt,
You’ve been obliged to give up dining out?”
Here I felt most outrageously inclined,
As vulgar people do, to speak my mind;

And say, 'What, oh unmitigated bore,
 Think you, God gave me my digestion for!
 And shall I not employ the precious boon
 According to the Donor's wishes, loon?
 For you, if ever like the rift in lute
 Or little pitted speck in garnered fruit,
 As sings our Tennyson, you've marred good fare,
 Or vexed good company by being there,
 'Twas ill, but it is over; fare you well;
 But quit the Town from Hyde Park to Pall Mall;
 At one place only you're no longer able
 To stir mild bloods, and that's the Dinner Table.'

But tyrant manners kept me meek and mute
 While he ran on, the galling little brute;
 "Do you write now? You know I always thought,
 In spite of all the critics, you had caught
 A coal from off the altar, on the whole;
 It might be small perhaps, but still a coal.
 The day may come when some one I could name
 May call attention"—Here I felt on flame,
 And should have blazed, but 'fire will drive out
 fire,'

As fools say Bacon sang to Shakespeare's lyre;

He linked his arm in mine! The action quenched
My rage at once; I own I fairly blenched
Before the thought that he would proudly show
Me as his captive to the gasping 'Row.'
"Where were you going when we met?" said he;
"Let's to the Gardens for a cup of tea."
At this I swore a silent oath or two,
For that was just what I was going to do;
And above all things wanted to be free
To join a table which Augusta V.—
As I had every reason to feel sure—
Had sent her servant forward to secure.
So I, "I fear I can't; I've sworn to go
And sit with poor old Blank an hour or so;
He broke his leg, you know, the other day."
"Of course he did! Well, Pont Street's in my way;
I'll go and see him too. Poor, dear old man,
He's chairman of the 'Phil-Athenian,'
And more than once has asked me to belong.
You're not a Member? Oh . . . then I was wrong
To mention this; don't peach on me I pray."
The small insufferable popinjay!
He funks, thought I, because he saw me grin;
Th' idea that Blank should want to bring *him* in!

We've heard that once the Roman Senate sat
 Unmoved to see a Horse Chief Magistrate ;
 But though they brooked to hear their Consul neigh,
 We well might shudder at this Donkey's bray ;
 And after all, it may be safely said
 Caligula's best Palfrey was well bred ;
 Besides, those Romans were a feeble lot,
 Their Emperor too was mad, which Blank is not.
 So mused I, he went lying on alone
 About great people he could scarce have known ;
 And who were proud to scribble, so he said,
 For some damned magazine he edited ;
 Until—I very much at odds with fate—
 We got into the crowd at Apsley Gate.
 There, all as sudden as had been my doom,
 Salvation, like a sunbeam, pierced my gloom.
 A Lady, no less powerful for good
 Than she who sent the Mantuan to that wood
 Where Dante wandered hopelessly astray,
 Stept calm and resolute athwart our way.
 Not over young was she, nor over slim,
 But straight, clear-eyed, respectable, and trim,
 And at the worst, quite good enough for him ;
 Spite of red cheeks, and fringe, with hat atop

That spread its glories like a florist's shop.
Her "Hullo, Charley!" set his face aflame—
I blest my stars that Charles was not my name—
I didn't stay to think who she might be,
Sister or wife 'twas all the same to me;
If wife, I hadn't got to bear the yoke;
And Bores, I take it, wive like other folk;
Or were she e'en what Politicians know
As "Minister without portfolio,"
She was my Guardian Angel; quick as thought
I seized upon my proffered freedom; caught
An honest Hansom Cabman's answering eye;
And drove off in a sort of ecstasy
To hear my little Torment vainly holloa
"Hi! stop!" *Sic me servaverat Apollo.*

AN INVITATION

“Jam Veris comites.”

HOR. Od. IV. 12.

IT strikes me Spring has come at last,
 The long East winds are overpast,
 O'er Boldre's now unflooded marshes
 The tall bog herbage is rising fast.

The birds are brisk, the squirrels brave,
 The grass is long enough to wave,
 This South West air is light and tender
 As May can make it, when she turns suave.

Last night was still as nights can be,
 And even warm enough for me
 To lie with both my windows open,
 And hear the song in a hawthorn tree

Of him whom Bards from earliest days
 Have miscalled 'her' in all their lays;
 But, he or she, last night's performance
 Eludes my feeble attempts at praise.

In yon high mead across the stream
I see a "boucol" with his team,
 And catch at whiles his cheery whistle,
Which sets me off on an idle dream

Of those old times when country boys,
In giving vent to vernal joys,
 Instinct with song and native music,
Did something better than make a noise;

And, propt cross-legged against a tree,
Could wake an artless minstrelsy,
 That pleased the God who loved the fleeces
And dark hillsides of their Arcady.

But 'twas not as the Bard of Spring
I just now set myself to sing;
 I must confess my heart was harping
On this more common and homely string.

I find that May distinctly grows
A thirsty month just ere its close,
 And saying this, I feel I say it,
By no means vainly, to one who knows

How good a name good Clarets bear,
Above all wines that ever were,
 For nursing hope and worry slaying,
And liquefaction of every care.

You know the 'crus'; the same Lafitte
Survives your faithful lips to greet,
 Brannaire-Duluc, and Pichon-Longueville,
So—hang the Peers and old Lombard Street!

The cellar waits, nor asks your bard
For 'fine' or 'foregift' or 'reward,'
 As, let us hope, not all in earnest,
Our Horace asked for his box of Nard.

Those days are gone—since Railways came
And turned the custom into shame—
 When Hosts would look that Guests should bring
 them
A stilton, basket of fish, or game.

Our ducks and chickens we aver
Are fit to tempt a Londoner;
 We deem ourselves, considering all things,
Not badly off for a fishmonger.

So '*velox veni*'! Leave behind
All traces of an urban mind,
 Your House of Lords, your Joint Stock Meetings,
And Balance Sheets of whatever kind.

I hold that you and I have won
The right to say 'our task is done,'
 And you should follow my ensample
Henceforward only to work for fun.

The end we dread not draweth near;
Whatever else be dim or clear,
 The tonic for Old Age is fooling,
And I've a stock of the mixture here.

SELF-INVITED

"Quantum distet ab Inacho."

HOR. Od. III. 19.

HOW many millions off insolvency
 Things like the 'Standard Bank,' though
 doubtless sound,
 Or 'London Water Board,' may really be,
 You'd tell me in a moment, I'll be bound.

For figures in that hivelike brain of yours
 Work far more kindly than my Hampshire bees,
 Who don't seem keen to fill their waxy stores,
 But, like our 'working-man,' are all for ease.

Poor souls, if they be idle, so am I;
 Of work I feel as if I'd had my fill,
 And watch the early summer days glide by
 All placidly from this Vicarious Hill;

Where, lulled by breeze and beam, I cease to care
 What Wellington would call 'a tupp'ny dam'
 For Paris ferment, or for Berlin scare,
 Or Russian Duma's most portentous sham.

And I must own, too slack am I at whiles,
 To watch the broth our own two Houses brew,
Or Joseph's traps, or Balfour's maiden wiles,
 Or how the parson tribe may put the screw

On Mr. Birrell, or the sons of toil
 Contrive to slap old Halsbury's hardy face,
And free the Unions from the legal coil
 He bound about them in the Taff Vale case;

Nor am I, though I chance to hold some share
 In one of London's biggest breweries,
Too anxious whether fate should smite or spare
 The Public Houses and their licensees.

No; here's a point I'm far more keen about;
 What are your plans for the sixteenth of June?
Do you propose to be in town or out?
 Or am I asking this a bit too soon?

And deem me not presumptuous if I
 Propound, as you've encouraged me to do,
An Brooks's Club me capiat, aut si
 Praeberes domum, if I asked you to.

'Twould be a dull pretence, as well you know,
 Were I to say the Club or Stratford Street
 Were havens of like joy to me, although
 In either case I fall upon my feet.

The old days of intrepid draughts are done,
 With toasts to usher in the rising moon,
 Survive the midnight, and salute the sun
 In welcomes that outsang the larks of June.

'Tis not the Muses who are '*impares*,'
 But we who are unequal to them now,
 There's not a '*vates*' living but would freeze
 With horror at nine Magnums in a row.

I doubt if e'en the Graces would concede
 Their own sweet number, or, still more, would
 deign
 To smile on modern votaries who would plead
 In the old '*juvat insanire*' vein.

Yet do they leave us roses still to strew,
 Soup, fish, a bird, one glass of '74,
 Bright talk, free laughter, with a chosen few
 Of those we wot of, and what need we more?

THE JILT

. . . " *Tu, magnorum numen laesura deorum,*
In verba jurabas mea;
O dolitura meâ multum virtute, Neæra;
Nam si quid in Flacco viri est
Non feret assiduas potiori te dare noctes;
Nec semel offensæ cedit constantia formæ.
At tu, quicumque es felicior, atque meo nunc
Superbus incedis malo,
Eheu translatos alio moerebis amores
Ast ego vicissim risero."

HOR. Epod. xv.

FAREWELL, thy halting soul already cowers;
 Time with his armies hath affrighted thee;
I see thee shrink before the bristling hours
 That head the cohort of the years to be.
 Blush not, thou art but one of those who fail;
 The story of thy lapse hath nothing new;
 The many falter and the few prevail,
 And thou art of the many, not the few.
I came without a right that I could plead,
 I go, and have no plaint to leave behind,

I held, but till it waned, for title-deed,
 One planet phase of thy revolving mind;
And would not now thou shouldst remember me,
Lest I repent me that I set thee free.

There is that in thee which doth draw men's hearts;
 A magic, as of sunlight upon flowers,
Which calls their perfume forth, and then departs
 Sated, and leaves them, drained, to the night
 hours.

I know that my supplanter shall arise,
 That thou wilt circle round him for a while,
Then fade from him, and search in alien skies
 For orbits new; it may be, with a smile,
That I shall see thee voyaging towards mine,
 With purpose to refoot thy dance round me;
But not again, O vagrant, will I shine
 In tame response to thine inconstancy:
Thou shalt but watch my soul its lone way taking,
Safe-guarded in a night of thine own making.

TWO BULLIES

Persius et Rupilius redivivi.

HOR. Sat. I. 7.

[Just as was doubtless its Horatian parallel, so the story told here is absolutely authentic. It was given to me in outline some forty-seven years ago by an old Australian gentleman, whom I know to have been incapable in such a matter either of invention or embroidery. Both of the actors in it have been dead for many years, but I nevertheless withhold their names from a feeling of reserve which I hope is justifiable, even though it be probable that only very few of my readers will be old enough to recognize from my sketch either or both of two very prominent, strongly marked, and memorable personalities.]

I HAD been reading Horace's quaint sketch
 Of that adroit and poisonous little wretch,
 Whom he calls Persius the Greek, and how
 An elementally tempestuous row
 In one of Rome's Provincial Courts began
 Between him and a well-known ruffian,
 Rupilius of Praeneste, whose loud tongue
 And large vocabulary, gained among
 The Latian vineyards, roared down Grecian wit;
 And there came back to me, re-reading it,

An analogue from old Colonial life
Of those Augustan bravoës and their strife.

Two men mine were—how named I must not
say—

Each eminent in his especial way;
A scholar one, of genuine Oxford fame,
A Classic of the Classics, when that name,
With Mathematics for a consort meet,
Unfretted, filled our Academic Seat;
Ere yet of universities a score,
With mushroom schools as many, if not more,
Wherethrough a thousand hobnails yearly pass,
Had vulgarized that good old grade—'First Class.'
Alas, he was a man of acid wit,
Unmeasured spleen, and heart of millstone grit;
One who must hate because he could not love,
Sparring all round, and never with a glove,
His one diversion to inflict a blow—
He rarely sought a friend, or lost a foe.
While ranged his bladed tongue, kept bitter still
From acrid founts of cynical ill-will,
What wonder if the plain Australian folk
Raged 'neath his wit's intolerable yoke,

And Bar and Club and Parliament were crammed
With souls who had dared Hell to see him damned.

The other was *pur sang* a pioneer;
No trace of inborn graces, no veneer
Of culture; burly, rough in frame and mind,
But rich in wisdom of the coarse-grained kind;
The lord of many streams where countless flocks
Roamed, not o'er acres, but good 'ten mile blocks';
A quiet man withal, on whom huge oaths
Sat negligently, like his ill-made clothes;
Relentless too, in quarrel as in trade,
No truce or scruple in the hands he played;
Nay, while his placid pulse beat on unstirred,
His pistol flashed hard on the umpire's word;
And if it did, and you were in the way,
Your heirs would benefit without delay;
And yet, 'twixt fear and liking, much in vogue,
Though three-parts savage, fire-eater, and rogue.

Small need to say when these encountered first
How lavishly the Pastoral Magnate curst,
Nor yet how soon 'twas widely understood
That he had sworn to have the Scholar's blood;

But here he failed; of all his foes alone
This Wit contemptuous lived, and held his own;
And Sydney laughed, well knowing how and why
Th' aggressor had achieved impunity.
'Twas thus; although to fighting disinclined
On 'general principles,' he was nearly blind;
And when invited, 'twas his simple plan
To say 'he could not see to shoot a man';
A vain reply; the fashionable whim
Was but to get a chance of shooting him;
Yet it sufficed; he managed to retain
His skin intact from horsewhip and from cane;
The hardest of his victims seemed to quail
Before a winter season spent in jail;
Besides, all minor measures in their eyes
Smacked of the very meanest compromise;
So, baffled, like the rest, the Magnate swore,
And thus relieved, yawned, and essayed no more.

One day, 'The Morning Herald' on his knees,
He smoked in unimaginative ease,
Full of that peace which some strong men can glean
From all their deeds, no matter how unclean.
So have I watched, as though in blissful dream,

Vesuvius heavenward innocently steam,
As if no havoc in its heart were stored,
And lava floods were things it never poured;
Thus he; when unto him, as playwrights say,
And welcome, so it proved, as flowers in May,
A friend, fresh from some upland Station, came,
Red hair erect, beard bristling, eyes aflame;
“That beggar’s been at me!” was his first cry;
“Has he? Sit down.” “They say he’s pistol-shy,
As we of prisons.” “So he is, no doubt;
Still, challenge him.” “We know he won’t come out;
Then, what’s the use?” “Never you mind,” said he;
“Send it, and when he answers, come to me.”

The invitation went, and was refused
For the stock reason, and the sender mused
As o’er defeat; to whose despondency
His friend retorted with a shout of glee.
“Sit down!” he cried, with triumph on his brow,
“I rather think we’ve got the Scholar now!
You post him a real pattern of abuse,
As loud as you can make it.” “What the deuce”—
“Do as I say!” He wrote; his Mentor read
The missive, shook a most superior head,

And half sighed, "Let me strengthen it a bit";
And strong it was when he'd rewritten it.
So went it forth, a draft, we well may guess,
As drastic as e'er issued from the press;
Effective too; the Squatter in a week
Received a summons to attend the Beak,
For sending words intended to provoke
A breach o' the peace. "Now here's a pretty joke,
See where I am!" "All right, my son and heir,
Call me, as your first witness; I'll be there";
Shouted the rampant Magnate, with a smack
Like a young earthquake on his Pupil's back.

The case came on, no facts were in dispute,
The Court was packed, the crowd intense and mute;
And once the Scholar smiled, as Shylock might,
Over his hour of vengeance now in sight.
Too soon; in answer to the Magistrate,
Defendant called the Magnate where he sat
Retired on the back benches; forth he came,
Assumed an artless air, and took the blame.
Said he, "So please your Worship, I admit,
As bound to do in frankness, that I writ
That letter for my friend; but understand,

I pray you, that I'd not have lent a hand
To write it, if I'd had the slightest thought
That its reception could or would be fraught
With any warlike consequence, and so
My friend here, the Defendant, thought, I know.
Please you, recall the Plaintiff; should he swear—
After reflection, speaking with due care—
He felt one twinge of an untoward desire
To place his sacred person under fire,
I shall express my undisguised surprise,
But still, in all good faith, apologize.”

Risu solvuntur tabulae; the Judge
Felt it a folly to go further: “Fudge”!
They heard the Scholar mutter—’tis the way
With wits like him, when beaten—from that day
He held his tongue; but on his caustic vein
Retention wrought as a perpetual pain;
He pined for a free flout; the Squatters prayed
To lose him, as for rain; awhile he stayed;
But soon their loose-tongued raillery prevailed,
They wore him down with laughter, and he sailed:
Peace in Antipodean purlieus reigned,
While London club-rooms lost what Sydney gained.

SMALL BEER CHRONICLES

LORD SHIRLEY *loquitur*

“Sermoni propiora.”

HOR. Sat. I, 4.

1. ABOUT ME AND MINE
2. JACK WILMOT
3. THE MARKHAMS
4. MY LADY.

ABOUT ME AND MINE

I RICHARD BRANSCOMBE, Earl of Shirley,
born

Tenth of my line, after my father's death,
Last male descendant of our Wilmot name—
Save such as figure in these chronicles—
And, as a Leech, whom sisterly intrigue
Let loose on me last autumn, volunteered,
Sound as a roach, in spite of seventy years,
Am living here at Branscombe all alone.
Nil habeo quod accusem senectutem ;
I hunt a little still, shoot a good deal,
And am for fishing what the fish themselves
Are for the may-fly or the water-shrimp ;
This, though an ancient bout of rheumatism
Has left me just a trifle lame, and makes me
Limp like some old cock pheasant who has had
A pellet in his drumstick and recovered.

I read a bit, I write a bit; at whiles
For conscience sake I do some county work,
Though bored to tears with all the pettiness
Inseparable from doing the thing well.
My tenants swear they love me, pay their rents—
Small blame to them, for these are very low,
And the land sound though lightish—twice a year
They dine with me, and Binns, my butler, knows
He must not stint them; yet they all drive home,
And year by year without an accident.
That man who came to grief by his own fault
Would die of having shamed them all; yet once,
After a Winter Audit years ago,
Poor old Dick Brand, one of my very best,
The soberest man for twenty miles about,
Rounding a sharpish turn near his own house
Came on a drunken navvy in the road;
His horse went down and out went he, to rise
Rampaging with a broken collar-bone;
The boy who sat beside him was unhurt,
And got him home. Next morning came a note
Writ by his wife, a decent penwoman,
To tell the story, and to add that Brand
Had made his carter flog the lout awake;

Not for revenge at his uncollared bone,
But from vexation at the thought that I
Might 'suspect something was amiss with Brand,
Which wasn't true.' I knew that well enough;
Drove over; and in quite a friendly way
Admonished him for the expression given
To his solicitude on my account;
But told him, should the navy view the thing
Regrettably, to send him on to me.
He never came; but to his death old Dick
Bore the stock chaff of being asked to tell
'The tale of how he broke his 'dinner-bone.'

Not very often, at Election times
A few among the newer men think well
To ask my Agent how they ought to vote.
He has his answer ready; 'As you like;
But I believe that Mr. Blank will stay,
While canvassing your side of the Division,
At Branscombe Place.' No colloquy proceeds
Beyond that point; those with more gumption hold
Their peace, and, as I think, they all vote straight.

Yet they are neither fools nor slaves, but men
Of hard good sense; they know and share my views,
Liking them none the less for being mine;

Free trade, a bold but friendly front abroad,
Firmness, no bounce; economy, reforms;
Efficiency in all the Services—
With brains and purity in one that seems
A little short of both, when that may be—
And nearer home, low rates, if possible;
Free education, with equality
To Church and Chapel, honest banishment
From social dictionaries of that term
Of patronizing cant, and obsolete
Sectarian pride that has outlived its power,
'Religious Toleration'—all of these
Are held by them in rough sufficiency,
And spread for them a platform of consent
Too broad to jostle on, with ample room
To sit and air all minor differences.
They like their County Council, one or two
Are members of it; these, I think, are glad
To find their landlord sitting with the rest
As Alderman, doing the common work.
They are no drunkards, yet in all the lot
You'd hardly find a stray tea-totaller;
And such as can afford their glass of wine
Buy no commercial traveller's compound stuff,

But go to a good man in Branscombe town,
Who treats them well, to whom I also give
A yearly order; this last fact of course
The vintner vaunts, and they and he are pleased.

Their labourers I leave to them; but Hodge
Knows none the less that, should the need be shown,
My intervention would come quick and sure.
So there we are, three classes, well content,
Like those in Plato's State; but, unlike them,
We have no myths behind of being wrought
From different clay, nor are we clamped and galled
By sterilizing laws, but rub along,
Far freer than outsiders deem of us,
With much goodwill and trust, and little spleen.

I had a friend of hotter blood than mine,
Whose temper was a chain of summer storms;
Conscious philosophizing was to him
Like spark to tinder, tinder to a match;
And of all folk who fretted him the worst
Were a large class, honest enough, at whom
He loved to puff his harmless smoke and fire,
Denouncing them with candour all his own,
As 'those obstructive querists who refuse
To seize life's actualities and act,

O'erprone to scent some underlying law
That hampers conduct.' I recall a day
When such an one throughout a morning tramp
Had served us twain a *lancem saturam*
Of moral messes, and among these, how
All rights were weak at most, if aught, and so
Not worth a plea, but duties paramount;
Scarce even were the two correlative,
For rights were naught in abstract, duties all.
Out burst my friend, made mad and militant;
He stamped his staff into the heath, flung back
His left arm well behind his loin, and cried:
"Oh, correlate me no correlatives,
Ethic or metaphysic, they involve
Conundrums that infuriate me; time was
When rival groups of schoolmen beat the air
Debating which was elder, thought or speech,
Their correlation being beyond dispute;
As Mansel said, who coached me for my schools,
The essence of true concepts lies in this,
They need to be presented in some sign;
And as with concept so with sign, no sign
Without its concept, be it verb or noun;
But which came first, let others fight over;

I think and speak, and that's enough for me.

“So in the moral field are set the lists
For your great tournament where champions
Ride in, as they have ridden for centuries,
To shiver lances for supremacy
Of duty over right, or vice versa.
Well, tilt away, my good philosophers!
I've learned enough to hold it little boots
To peer past practice into origin.
Truths show themselves in action; your displays
Are surface counterfeits that teach no truth.
But take this tribute, if you'll have it, yours
I treat as mere benevolent escapades,
And, pardon me, I laugh; false though they be,
I have no hate for them; they leave behind
No acrid taste i' the mouth; I loathe them not
As I loathe shams of more insidious aim,
Those slyly postulated dogmata,
Whate'er their province, church or parliament,
Platform or treatise, where my soul detects
A savour of the lust of power, that passion
Which has been ever and shall ever be
The one relentless menace to mankind.
Nimrod or Alexander, Buonaparte,

Cyril or Torquemada, Gardiner,
Strafford, with all the smaller modern fry
Of meaner scope and method, lay or cleric,
Demagogue, priest, or prancing ritualist,
Your politician, or your pamphleteer,
Or who else woo the gaping crowd, and dance
Sophistic gillie-callums mid the points
And blades of truth; living or dead, whoe'er
Such are or were, all are detestable.
To change the metaphor—maggots are they,
Bred of corruption, whose unwholesome bite
Leaves fester in the souls of better men.”

He had to bear our laughter without stint
At hearing such a storm of hate from one
Himself no whit averse from power. For me,
Although I loved him as I've loved but few,
I sketch him but to show what I am not;
My furies give a far more lambent flame;
I hope I neither flatter nor oppress,
Because I live at odds with theory;
I own my duties, but hold fast my rights;
I found both to my hand, and take them both
For weekday facts; they seem assertible,
What eager men of science wisely call

Working hypotheses; not to be changed
Too lightly, till new certainties have orbed
Their elements into supplanting forms;
Binary stars they are, revolving round
Me as their common centre; how evolved
I know not, care not.

For all human order
Change looms, like processes which level down
Mountains that seem eternal, and are not;
But cosmic change, the true advance of fate,
Comes slow and unperceived, needs spacious
times

For its perfection, and could but take shape
To eyes that were undying, not to ours.
So, *pace* politicians, prophets, thinkers,
And all the puzzled puzzlers of the pen,
I give both hands to practice, take my rights
For others' duties, and my duties own
As others' rights; 'tis not for me to strike
A hurried and perchance discordant note
Athwart life's harmony; rather 'tis for me
To see that no one else does, this I do.

Being such and so surrounded, much alone,
With not too much to do, I now propose

Throwing my thoughts back through my threescore
years,

To choose out thence a few loose incidents
That most have moved me, and perchance may be
Of interest to those I leave behind.

My life were hardly worth a chronicle;
But these stand out like camei on the face
Of a blank matrix, or a sundered string
Of islets on a featureless lagoon.

A most disastrous metaphor, that last,
And unpremeditated as untoward;
I would recall, erase it, if I thought
Its disappearance from the page would keep—
But that I know too well it would not do—
My roving wits from going off at score.
A breath, as Byron puts it, may draw down
An avalanche in mountainous o'erwhelming;
An anvil ringing to the hammer's rhythm
Has preluded sonatas; some poor line
Or callow thought in an inferior poem
Has set fine subjects seething in great brains;
Impulse once given her from without, away
Rushes the soul; her method, motive, speed,
Direction, are thenceforth her own; all things,

In short, come from within, except that one
Little external nudge which wakes them all.

Well, as I said, that most unlucky phrase
Of rocky islets bridging a lagoon,
Has played the part of breath to avalanche
And buried this first chronicle of mine
Under a hundred lines of episode;
It has recalled and sets me on to tell—
Nor could I now resist it if I would—
A Hindoo legend I once read, and love
Far more than its Mosaic parallel,
Of Adima and Heva and their fall.
It tells how the primeval pair were placed
Within an unfenced garden in Ceylon.
If flowers and fruits and landscape could have held
The mind of man for ever, they had stayed,
As partridges, those most homekeeping birds,
Are faithful to the farm where they are reared.
But man must move and woman follow him.
In spite of peril threatened and mischance,
If once they left their native bowers, they strayed,
Sated of Eden's uneventful bliss,
From point to point about their Island Cage.
To that th' Almighty's *fiat* held them fast,

Deterred this time by no mere warning hint
Of evil accident, but threat of doom
Unnamed, mysterious as the sea itself
Their watchful jailor.

Heva soon began,
Her love of travel ended and of change,
To urge return; on curiosity
Inexplicable fears and shuddering presage
Had frowned, and bidden her remorseful soul
Reseek the shelter of the will divine.

But Adima strode northward, unassuaged
His thirst and yearning for things new and strange.
Facile his answer to his timorous wife;
“No prohibition had been laid on them;
They were left free to wander at their will
Within their Island, whose extent defined
Their kingdom, though the Garden was their home.
’Twas true their Maker had forbidden them
The mainland, but, in making that his charge,
Had added that the residue of Earth
Was yet raw, rude and uninhabitable,
And sundered from them by a waste of sea.
How easy was the keeping of a law
Whose framer, in his love and wisdom, left

No motive and no means to disobey.
Full exploration made within the pale
Of God's permission, they would straight return
To their own pleasaunce, that awaited them,
Content to rest and never more to roam."

So argued Adima; sweet Heva sighed
Her self-abandonment, and followed him—
Her love at war with a new sense of sin—
By hill and valley to the Northern shore.

There marked they how a narrow causeway
 stretched
Across a measurable strait, and gave
Difficult access to a continent
That spread beyond it, vast, and marvellous
No more in range than beauty; lawns they saw
Studded with stately trees, whose symmetry
Uncrowded, unimpaired, rose towering far
Into the limpid heaven; these dowered the earth
They sprang from with a loving gift of shade
That only made the sunlight mild; nor checked
The gaiety of multitudinous flowers,
All new to their two first beholders. Birds,
Of forms and plumage strange, with novel song
Made music in the branches, or below

Flitted from flowery to fruit-laden boughs
Of lowlier shrubs; a gentle wind blew south
Adown the causeway, courier of sweet sound
And sweeter perfume. Adima gazed long,
Impatient, silent, but in act to place
A foot upon the rocky path; while She
His Monitress, irresolute, alas,
And too much his to combat his desire,
E'en had she shared it not, stood quivering
With dread and rapture; till she found her hands
Clasping his neck, and his strong arms beneath
Uplifting her; nearer and nearer grew
The splendours that allured them both, and once
'Tis said her husband heard the words, 'Quick,
quick,'
Break from her fevered lips. One foot advanced
Touched the new shore; but as its fellow left
The last rock of the ledge, a crash and roar
Resounded from behind them; when they turned,
Sea-waves were seething where the causeway ran,
And nothing save a few wide-sundered heaps
Remained to mark its loss; in vain they looked
For comfort to the mainland; all had changed;
The mirage that had lured them was no more;

Lawns, trees, fruits, flowers, birds, perfumes, all
were gone,

And in their place low sand-blown marshes stretched,
Whose weeds, half-withered by the bitter spray,
Rocked in a gray inhospitable air.

The laugh of Demons was their welcome home,
For home this was to be; dumb, motionless,
They stood awhile, locked in each other's arms,
Where love alone remained to them, and love
Was powerless yet: the meek-souled Heva said,
"Lose we no time, for pardon let us kneel;
He left us to ourselves to stray thus far;
Haply he may provide for our return."

But on her words, a voice from out of heaven
Spoke sternly; "Ye have sinned, and for your sin
Death is the penalty; but, Heva, thou
Hast done what thou hast done for love of him
Whom thou wast formed to love; I pardon thee,
And him for thee; but ye may not regain
Abandoned innocence; ye have let loose
The powers of evil upon Earth, and so
For ever must ye combat them; no more
Her flowers and fruits shall an ungrudging soil
Bring forth, but profitless and harmful weeds,

Save on compulsion of unceasing toil;
Ye and your progeny with sweat and pains
Must win what once it gave of its free will.
Yet, that I may not leave you comfortless,
Though ye have wronged, forgotten, flouted me,
Heva, with thee I make my covenant;
And for reward of what, but for thy love,
Had yet been constancy, thy name shall mean
'She who completes his destiny for man;'
Mother of many daughters shalt thou be
Who shall be born successors of the hope
I set before thee now; far in their line,
From out the loins of one of them, and so
From thine, in fulness of the fated time,
A late Redeemer shall arise, whose birth
Shall sanctify thine honour, and thenceforth
Create for womanhood a cult divine:
His work shall win the pardon of your race,
As ye its condemnation; he once more
Shall make it one with me as once ye were."

Now, in default of audience, I must needs
For this impertinent parenthesis
Ask pardon of myself, and grant it, too!

Setting thereby a lasting precedent
For future ramblings which my arm-chair soul
Intends too frankly for apology,
And loves as much too dearly to forego.
I've said it was the Islets and Lagoon
That started me, and now I see myself
Pausing, like Adam, on the further shore
Of that fair island which my life has been,
To mark the living peaks of memory,
And muse on all the wreck of meaner things
That water-like oblivion hath submerged;
And meditate how in a little while
The few upstanding shapes shall haunt me still,
Sailing, with Death for Master Mariner
To hold the tiller, through that narrow strait
Which parts me from a mystic Malabar.

In front of these, my Small Beer Chronicles,
When once I'm fairly started, if indeed
I ever am, I shall place one that tells
By what a happy chance it was that he,
Who will, I hope, succeed me in this place,
Can step into my seat with head erect,
Well loved and well esteemed of all, instead

Of sidling in enveloped in a cloud
Of grave but baseless mystery and doubt,
Which, had we others not played Aeolus
And scattered it, he, whose fatuity
Had drawn it, as a hillside draws the mist,
Would have left far too long and firmly settled
For his unaided breath to dissipate.

My father's only sister, Lady Anne,
Married Sir Robert Wilmot; they were both
Great grandchildren of Richard our sixth Earl,
And so were second cousins; a love match,
Yet fitting, as so few love matches are.
He, well-born, handsome, well to do, and she,
Even as I recall her, lovelier
Than all the other women I recall,
Save perhaps one; my Uncle I scarce knew;
What with my school and college absences,
And the displacements of his barrack life,
We seldom met; '*Nel mezzo del cammin*'
The dread Crimean winter cut him off;
His wife died forty years ago at most.
She lived a widow with an only Boy,
'An Angel with a Cupid by her side;'
So said my Mother, who was widowed too,

With one sweet girl who well might play the Nymph
To her divinity, and a romping lad,
Some three years older than his cousin Jack,
And younger by the self-same interval
Than his own pretty sister, but, by Jove,
Not quite the model to drape Cupids on!
My dear old winsome Mother, crammed with sense,
And, spite of undisputed comeliness,
A real good bit of home-spun Hereford,
Let me have no illusions on that score.
I can't resist her portrait; she was tall,
And neither slim nor coarse; quick, hazel eyes,
Shone 'neath a broad low forehead and deep brows.
Her cheeks were neither ruddy nor yet pale,
Her nose, perhaps too short, was fitted well
To the neat upper lip, small shapely mouth
And well-set chin: she wore her chestnut hair
According to the fashion of her day,
Framing her cheeks, close laid, and matronly.
Folk thought her strength austerity, perhaps
Great force must ever seem austere, but she
Was loving, gentle, sweet, as well as strong.
My hard rough features pained her, though she rose
In fury, should a careless tongue betray

The like regret; one day some female fool—
Without a touch of malice, let me say—
Expressed it in a letter; she jumped up,
And read the passage through to me; I laughed;
But she raged round like Hecate, and then,
Accepting our joint knowledge of the fact,
Crushed the offending missive, while she cried,
“If anyone should dare, woman or man,
To say you didn’t look a gentleman,
From your shock head down to your boot-tips—
well,

I’d shoot them like a dog!” “Grammar!” cried I;
“Oh my sweet Mother, you are looking now
As old Bellona Garnons must have looked
Loading her match-locks in the famous siege.”
“I should not wonder,” quoth she, and tore up
The silly script into a hundred shreds.

‘Bellona’ Garnons was her ancestress,
A matron of the ‘Martyred’ Stuart’s days,
Wife to Sir Francis Garnons of The Moat,
By Aymestrey, between Leominster and Presteign,
And, as the crow flies, some ten miles or so
South-west of Ludlow; the brave Dame had earned
Her nickname on this wise; her Knight was one

Of many scores of neutral gentlefolk,
Doubting but honest men, who loathed at heart
Ship-money, Star Chamber, and Strafford's rule;
But, law-abiding, would not draw their swords
Either against or for their erring king,
And suffered from both sides in consequence,
Sometimes in purse, but always in esteem.

One Autumn afternoon in that dark year
While Charles, o'ermatched, was wandering, sore
perplexed,

This way and that, after the Naseby rout,
Twixt Hereford and Raglan, and so down
To Cardiff, and then back; his hankering eyes
Strained upon Bristol, but, as Shakespeare says,
'Letting I dare not wait upon I would,'
Till at the last he made for Ludlow town—
The Knight, his Dame, and their three proper sons,
Stood at their hall door watching the approach
Of two tired horsemen up the avenue.
These wore the Cavalier dress, and soon,
Spite of the crescent shade from towering elms,
Much to the perturbation of the group,
They knew them for their beaten monarch Charles
And young Lord Scudamore his Equerry.

The pair had missed their escort in the woods;
Some false alarm of ambuscade had caused
A scamper, and the King with his young friend,
After a toilsome ride throughout the day,
Had found themselves towards sundown in a
clearing

Whence they emerged hard by the Aymestrey gates.

Loyalty brushed embarrassment aside,
And in brief space the weary fugitives
Were seated at a very welcome meal;
But, ere its close, in rushed a serving-wench
With news that a full score of Cromwell's horse
Were calling for a guide at a farm-house
A bare two miles away by road; the lad,
Who came with this intelligence, had drawn
A bee-line thence by path and stile, but so,
Could not be long ahead of them. "Thank God,
The drawbridge is in order," cried the Knight;
Open the sluice into the moat; and bar
The ground floor shutters; call in all the grooms;
Bring all our matchlocks here, and load and prime;
Fill every bucket you can find with water,
And have them ready on the upper floors."

In scarce an hour the rebels, though decoyed

Round half a dozen most convenient lanes,
Stood by the moat; their gruff Lieutenant, schooled
In all the symptoms of recusance, bawled,
“Admittance, in the name of Parliament!”
To his first call a steady female voice
Came from a well-barred window, “Go your ways!
We’re quiet country people in this house,
And hold for neither King nor Parliament.”
After some brusque debate, war was declared.
Ladders were found and brought; “Take those
things back,”
Roared out stout Garnons, “or by all the saints,
I open fire.” The only answer was
To drag a ladder towards the moat edge, where,
If once across, it would command the chains
That held the draw-bridge, and then all was lost.
Four match-lock muzzles blazed at once, and two
Out of the troopers were accounted for,
While a third hopped away blaspheming hard.
The fight was short but lively; old ‘Bellona,’
Bare-armed, rammed home the bullets with a will,
As did her wenches. Not for nought, it seemed,
Her three big sons during the winter months
Had braved the censure of their mother’s thrift

For waste of lead and powder, day by day,
Potting the rabbits in the avenue.
Their bag of rebels in this little bout
Had been eleven; nine were killed outright,
And two disabled; many a narrow shave
Had taught the boys to be particular
In opening shutter-chinks to get an aim.
The eldest had a flesh-wound near the shoulder,
And one poor wench fell over with the shock
Of a rib cracked, in spite of her tough bodice.

But still the moat remained unbridged, and so,
Unused the faggots brought to burn the doors.
The Leader, pondering o'er his nine dead men,
And the two 'tailored' ones in foot and wing,
Thought it no shame—perhaps unconsciously
Musas amabat impares—to save
The other nine; he drew them off, and formed
Well out of fire; the lame one was hauled up,
And went off groaning, both hands on his pommel,
To keep the weight from off his damaged heel,
As best he might; his comrade broken-armed
Rode with him; the gruff Leader, harsh as gall,
Turned round, and shook his fist, swearing aloud
He'd come back shortly with a hundred men,

And two good field-pieces, and blow the twigs
Of their malignant nest to all the winds.
And so they rode back down the avenue,
Old Garnons watched them through the gates, sent
out

A trusty lad to keep them company
For some few miles, unseen; had two good nags
Made ready for the King and Scudamore;
And just ere morning broke conveyed them safe
By devious ways into the Ludlow road.

The King despatched, the wench's broken rib
Well splinted, and young Richard's shoulder
dressed,

They buried their nine troopers in a row,
The churchyard wall skirted the bowling green,
And 'twas perchance this handy neighbourhood
That made the Gruff One leave their burial
To those whom after all he mainly held
Responsible for its necessity.

The trust was handsomely administered;
A wooden cross was set to mark each grave,
And, heading each, they hung the occupant's
Sword, match-lock, boots, buff jerkin, morion;
And, behind all, the Manor carpenter

Set up a decent head-board thus inscribed ;
' Here lie Nine Soldiers of the Parliament
Killed in fair fight '—on such and such a day.

Then, sure enough, before a week had passed,
Once more they saw a rebel cavalcade
Stream, just ere sundown, up the avenue.
These were the threatened Hundred, and worse
still,

Behind them lumbered two long field-pieces,
With gunners, tumbrils, fuses, rammers, mops,
And mouths most businesslike and ominous.

The Knight, my Lady, their three Boys, grooms,
maids,
Stood clustered on the steps ; amongst the last
Poor little Partlet of the broken wing
Showed prominent ; but as the Column rode
On to the lawn, deploying into line,
Our good Knight gave a most unquiet groan,
Whispering to his Spouse " Old Noll, by God !"
And, with his words, the great man of that Age,
Drew rein, and beckoning to an Orderly,
Leaned towards his charger's neck, and rolled
himself
Unaided from his saddle ; on he strode,

Or rather, straddled to the moat; the Knight
Came down to meet him, hat in hand; his wife
Pressed close behind; all presentations seemed
Beside the question; Cromwell blurted out,
“What’s this, Sir Francis Garnons?” How the
Knight
Might have replied, we know not; for the Dame,
Not for the first time in all likelihood,
Coupait la parole, as the Frenchmen have it;
“God save your excellence,” she calmly said,
“My husband is no speaker: Monday last,
About this hour, King Charles, accompanied
By young Lord Scudamore came in on us;
Their horses foundered, and themselves outworn
By fast and travel; ’twas not in our hearts,
Nor in our duty, as I understand,
To shirk the risk of hospitality,
And drive him, who, howe’er his faults have run,
Be it to treason ’gainst our liberties,
Is still our lawful Monarch, from our doors.
We gave him food and house-room for the night;
Made him an honoured guest; we take no part
In all these wars; until that afternoon
Neither my husband, nor his sons, had drawn

Blade or burnt powder on the King's behalf,
Or yours; brief entertainment given,
At streak of dawn, had nothing intervened,
We should have sent them on their way, but scarce
Was supper ended, when your men appeared.
So put to it, wouldst thou, to save thy skin
Have played the traitor to such fugitives,
Or done as we did? Yonder Officer,
Whose visage I recall, will bear me out;
He made us brief debate; we had to fight,
Or own our prize, and yield it; so we fought.
The rest thou knowest. In the churchyard there
Lie honourably buried thy nine men.
Come thou and see. For us, we did no more
Than what all gentle people, thou thyself,
If tried, hadst done. Can malice or revenge
Prompt thee to shoot us down and burn our house?
Shoot all, burn all, or touch us not at all."

She ceased; the grim old Regicide stood there
Biting his gauntlet; "Madam, I pardon it,"
He muttered; then aloud, in softer tone,
"Show me the graves you spoke of." The good
Dame
Stept down, and led the way, while Oliver

Followed in line with Garnons and the boys,
And the Lieutenant, sour and crestfallen.
The regimental numbers of the dead,
And so their names, were known; their General
Read the inscription; took the Lady's hand
And held it; begged the Crosses might be changed
For tablets bearing each man's name; then turned
And said; "As you have harboured Charles, my foe,
So, prithee give me lodging for this night."

Thus went they back, accorded, to the Hall;
The good Knight made all welcome to his best;
Cromwell sat down, and supped, unconsciously,
In the same high-backed chair where Charles had
sat,

Anticipating there those graver days,
When throned at Westminster he should usurp
The seat and office of the headless King.
His men-at-arms, well cheered with meat and drink,
Lit their innocuous fires of bivouac
About the park; and ere the sun was high
The General, with a jest about the Knight
Whose long-delayed baptismal escapade
Had reddened in the fount of one good fight
The pallor of neutrality, went off.

Of course thenceforward until now, a hat,
A pair of jack-boots, and a single spur,
Adorn, as his, the room he used; 'twould seem
That, if he dropped habiliments about,
County by County, through these favoured isles,
As freely as such relics indicate,
He was a dresser more expensive far
Than the most sumptuous of younger sons
That ever filtered through St. James's Street.

But here am I; the low light through the blinds
Of my west window warns me; I have sat
This livelong day doing the very thing
I half hoped to avoid when I set forth;
I've gossiped on in my besetting mood
Of chattering egoist about me and mine,
Things past and present, folks alive and dead,
Of what, in short, none living save myself
Will value; 'tis too late to touch to-day
Jack Wilmot's episode—but that will keep.
Nor would I for a ream of recollections,
After three days of wellnigh ceaseless rain,
Miss seeing a bland autumn sunset smile,
And touch yon forest-girdled marsh and stream
All tenderly, while they their looks of love

Cast up from quietude of deepening shade.
So might I stretch a patronizing hand,
And pat an old retriever on the back,
While he accepted it, with eyes and tail
That beamed and wagged in honest gratitude.
So farewell, pen, and welcome, hat and staff;
I'll call that same retriever, and set out
To fetch an appetite from off the moor.

JACK WILMOT

NINE days of scarcely intermitted wind,
 With rain wellnigh as ceaseless; I esteem it
 A good man's privilege to hate at will
 Strange weathers when they're bad, but not his own;
 To back my native climate up I hold
 Part of my duty towards my neighbour; yet
 Of all home seasons that I love the least
 Commend me to the Equinoctial twins,
 Both Vernal and Autumnal; each of them
 Has its own vice, and one in common, wind.
 Kingsley one day, of pure perversity,
 In welcome of the 'wild-North-Easter', wrote
 Some lines a deal too good for his mad theme,
 Though, as may be expected when a man
 Upholds a faulty thesis, full of faults.
 In fact he stumbled into every trap
 His subject set for him; he welcomes it
 As coming 'o'er the German foam', as though
 'Twere likely that imported winds should scape
 The general inferiority

Of all things 'made in Germany'; he dubs it
'The jovial wind of winter', save the mark!
'That turns us out to play'; the only games
It could be held to foster were club whist,
Low bridge, or billiards, or brain-burning chess.
But how on earth a decent sort of man,
Who ever rode to hounds, could point ten lines
Descriptive of an ironbound winter day
By volunteering 'breast high lies the scent,'
Passes my comprehension; further on
He hazards one more paradox; cries 'Chime,
Ye dappled darlings, through the sleet and snow,
And *down* the roaring blast.' Of course 'tis true
That scent is more capricious than most girls,
And sometimes good when frost is threatening,
As sweetest smiles prelude a serious frown;
That foxes, when they can, run down a wind
Which doesn't blow their fur back overmuch;
But to misuse a raging north-east gale
Environed with the worst concomitants
Of winter, as providing terms t' express
The virtues of a pattern hunting day,
Makes each particular hair to stand on end
About the scalp of my experience

When he winds up with 'Blow, thou wind of God!'
I can no more with him; he risks his claim,
In that most reckless of affiliations,
Coming on so much else, to every name
Wherewith, but for this ode, we were content
To swell all other tributes on his tomb,
'Good Poet, sporting parson, and wise man.'

 But this much for the Vernal Equinox;
Its mere position in the calendar
Redeems it; it presages better things;
And though its blasts are infinitely bad,
They blow the trumpet of the coming Spring;
We live in hope throughout its turbulence.
Not so with its Autumnal congener;
Each sough of its tempestuous voices rings
The cruel knell of our loved summer months,
And drives us in before it like a crowd
Of homeward mourners after funeral.

 I sat me down here after a long trudge
By thick-lipped lanes and slippery meadow paths,
To tell Jack Wilmot's story, but it seems
I am incorrigible; each fresh attempt
To think of others lands me in myself,

As all roads lead to Rome. Once, years ago,
I went down Severn in an open boat,
Well-manned and tight, to meet the rising tide.
The stream ran racing down, like Kingsley's hounds;
And as it played with us, and each roll seemed
To hurl us onward to the next below,
The boatmen pointed out a well-known rock
That looked a mile ahead, when, swish, almost
While they were pointing, we were at it; swish,
Once more, and we were hopelessly sent back
Just where we started from; this idle game
Went on until some slant of current came
And gave us a clear course. So 'tis with me;
I would not at this moment for my life
Forbear to tell how, as I think, I came,
In spite of gifts and chances, to decline
On this arm-chair existence, books, and sport,
The round of county business, management
Of farms, and, as it were for seaside change,
Some sundry meddlings in my friends' affairs;
But with myself at bottom of them all—
A soup, with Shirley for its sediment.

I came down from the University
With some repute for brains, and took my seat

Mid many shows of welcome; the old Duke
Who'd led the country Party in our House,
My father's friend, had me well introduced,
Gave me good counsel, and encouraged me
With hopes of this and that. He died too soon
To guide me far enough. I had to make
Myself my leader, and I proved a bad one.
Rightly or wrongly, wrongly, I suppose,
'I could not tame my nature down'—e'en now
The words that shaped my destiny, as his
Who penned them, come again to me—'for he
Must serve who fain would sway, and soothe, and sue,
And watch all time, and pry into all place,
And be a living lie, who would become
A mighty thing amongst the mean, and such
The mass are.'

Yes, I did despise the game;
The players saw, and would have none of me.
They said I was impracticable; well,
As the world goes, I was. Yet, I maintain
'Twas to their method that I would not stoop;
I could have welcomed every settlement,
Played opportunism with the best of them,
Taken occasion's half-loaf, and admitted

The claims, e'en of the fools, to compromise ;
In short, I was quite ready to conform,
But not to stoop to cunning and false cries.
And what I was in youth I am in age ;
What I recoiled from then, I spurn to-day.

To point the past by modern instances,
Not mine to traffic for a band of votes
By dangling in a deftly guarded phrase
That which I never meant to give ; proclaim
Retention in some esoteric sense
Of creeds I had abandoned ; call myself
What others were but I was not ; or brand
As 'shibboleths'—whatever the slang means—
Truths that take rank with Euclid's axioms,
Because a waste of millions by the hundred
Cried out for revenue and colossal lies
To falsify the causes of its need
To those whose poverty would sink to be
Starvation 'neath its burden ; least of all
By infamous instalments stoop to buy
Each purblind group of many-headed Greeds,
With doles intended to have played their part
Before a decade of enlightenment
Came round and drew aside gaunt Ruin's veil.

Nor could I help to swell the canting cry,
Of 'Godless Britain' among those who know,
E'en while they raise it, that the change they hate
Means only that the hour of liberty
Has sounded, when the mastery of the poor
Must pass from them, and when their favoured
sect,
No longer dominant, though none the less
Hungering for domination, must give place,
To make a new and fairer start for life
On its own merits 'mid its sister creeds.

All this, and more like this, I now declare
Has made an exile of me through my life.
I know the verdict on me well enough,
'Prig in his youth, pigheaded in his age;'
I grin and bear it; it is half the truth,
Yes, half the truth, perhaps e'en more than half,
But, like most condemnations, not the whole.

Thus did my life, like Hudson's boat of old,
Its hawser flung off by his comrades' hands,
Drift from the ship of State; and here am I,
Not, like that old sea-tyrant, left to starve
And rot a lonely corpse 'neath torrid suns,

Until the crazy seams should gape and part
And let his wandering coffin sink with him;
Or until he and it touched ground, the first
Intruders into some sequestered creek;
There, after many seasons, blanched and dried,
Ribs framing ribs, a skeleton encased
Within a skeleton, to disappear
Slowly beneath a pall of blown sea-sand.
No; safe and sound to this fair anchorage,
Land-locked and circumscribed, but better far
Than a broad offing of tempestuous seas,
I steered, to find content and happiness,
A sense of value round me and of love;
With some capacity for work, and more
For friendship; ready to accept the names
Of idler, failure, egoist; with just
That one redeeming dash of altruism
Some lenient friends concede me, as the monks
Of Leicester, when the ruined Cardinal
Came to their house to die, disgraced, despoiled,
Gave him a little earth for charity.

Now for Jack Wilmot; well, one afternoon
I sauntered into 'Bright's' at luncheon time,

And asked if Jack were there; "He's not, my Lord,"
Answered the Porter, knowing we were kin;
"But here's a Lady with two little boys
Enquiring for him." I looked down and saw
With much astonishment and more dismay
A tell-tale portraiture in both the lads;
Jack's handiwork was stamped on each of them.
I took them in both hands and led them off,
Beckoning the Lady to the waiting-room.
There, half in fright, the younger one gave tongue
Without circumlocution; "If you please,
We've come to see Papa." Down swooped the girl
On the poor little culprit, but in vain.
I knew too much, though not enough; I saw
Tears swelling in the troubled chaperon's eyes;
So rang the bell, and to the man who came,
"Bring here the last month's file of 'Punch,'" said I,
"And let me have the small back room upstairs
For half an hour or so. Boys, you stay here,
And look at 'Punch' till we come back." At once
They perched upon two chairs and pegged away.
"Just come with me," said I to the poor girl,
Whom, like a fool, I took for mother first,
And afterwards for nurse. We got upstairs;

I told her what my name was, asked for hers;
Heard she was mother's sister to the boys;
There was no need to ask their father's name,
But was he married? Yes. How long? A year
Before the eldest son was born, and he
Was eight years old. No grandparents alive?
No other kin, your Lordship; she and I—
To cut her timorous stammering story short,
Herself and sister, Lady Wilmot, more,
If I should keep my purpose, as I have,
Countess of Shirley to become some day,
Whence my excuse for curiosity,
Were two sole daughters of a clergyman;
Their mother, left in poverty, had toiled
To keep a decent house above their heads,
And been, the common tale, Jack's landlady;
Her sister had done nothing to entice
Sir John; indeed, refused him more than once,
She could assure me, though she loved him well:
They were both honest girls. Then out there came
A burst of sobbing, and I must confess
She looked uncommon pretty through her tears.
A woman's tears! The very word recalls
Some that I once watched—There it is again!

If I don't stop, I shall be off at score
Upon an egoistic interlude
Of why I never married, and as says
Some writing fellow of the better sort,
That is another story. To return:
This was the first time she had brought the boys;
And only now because their careless sire
Had promised them a morning pantomime,
And had gone out of town forgetting it.
I rang the bell at this; "Send off and see
If you can get a Box at Drury Lane."
The Porter countered with an envelope
Directed to th' unconscionable Jack,
With 'Drury Lane Box Office' stamped thereon.
"Dry up your tears, my dear," said I; "the Boys
Shall have their pantomime." In half an hour
There was I seated in a first tier box
Behind my heir-presumptive's heir. I scanned
The whole house closely, and by great good luck
Knew nobody; my sister, Lady Anne,
Might have been there with all her little brood.
I could not then have told her whose these were,
And, if I'd called them 'two young friends of
mine,'

Her eyes had stretched to snapping.

There they sat,

On either side their Aunt, in ecstasies
Evoked of clown and chocolate combined—
We'd called at a good tuck shop on our way—
'Two budding gentlemen beyond dispute,
Their manners, diction, accent, are all right,'
Thought I, 'and judging from their little Aunt,
Unless that most conspicuous idiot,
Their father, chose amiss between the girls,
Their mother is a lady.' Once or twice,
Most keenly in the transformation scene,
And final show outblazing fairy-land,
They asked 'if I could see'; and pressed me hard
To taste the *bon-bons*. I enjoyed myself.
When all was over, and we stood outside,
'Good-bye, thanks awfully,' said both of them;
The wise Aunt took the chocolate in charge;
And noting their address in Pimlico,
I clapped the cab door to, and they were gone.

I lighted a consultative cigar,
Smoked it, and took its counsel, 'Don't you leave
That poor young woman down in Pimlico
Twenty-four hours to brood and fidget in.'

So off I went much meditating; sore,
Beyond all question; in some natural doubt
About the story; even at the best,
That handsome ass, who called himself my cousin,
Had wrought a tangle for his family
Not easy to undo. Well, there I stood;
The house showed neat, was in a decent row;
The trim and quiet handmaid at the door
Looked like a lady's servant; at my name
She stared a bit, not overmuch, and so
I mounted to the little drawing-room.
This was discreetly furnished, in good taste,
With pretty chintzes, and mahogany,
That most respectable of woods; no sign
Of *demi-monde* or *bourgeoisie*; indeed,
In one small corner cupboard, not too much
In evidence, some bits of china spoke
Of the old country Rectory; as I stood
Faisant la signe, in stepped the Chatelaine;
Her sister, only better; 'Oh,' thought I,
'Dam'me, he's picked the right one!'

Down we sat;

I soon had her at ease; her story came
Simply, but not too glib; birth, parentage,

And education, all were good enough
To make the disappointment bearable;
The secret was the crux; in that I own
I was relieved to find no silly fear
Of me or of the world had part; Jack's dread
Had been but for his Mother, delicate,
And proud, as she was frail; he thought to pluck
His rose of love, and save her, while she lived,
What to her soul had been the thorny pain
Of knowing her Boy married 'out of bounds.'
Now she was gone—she died the year before,
And as my hostess mentioned this, my glance
Caught her half-mourning dress—both Jack and
she

Were scheming daily how to let me know;
She owned they shied that. "Well," said I at last,
"I'm more than glad, my dear, I found you out;
You write to Jack at once, and so will I.
And now, good-bye; I'll make all right for you."
By George, she burst out crying, seized my hand,
And kissed it hard; I bolted on the spot.

I was still furious; Jack's idiocy
Had brought a problem into all our lives,
His and his wife's, my own, and Lady Anne's.

Nor was the issue plain; it's very well
To talk of grasping nettles, but they sting,
However handled; for the ass himself,
I hoped he'd like my note. This ran, "Dear Jack,
'Twas by the merest chance that yesterday
I went to lunch at 'Bright's,' and asked for you;
You were not there, but a young Lady was,
With two nice Lads; the Porter, none to blame,
Let drop their purpose there, and, may I add,
Their looks told their paternity aloud.
I marched the group into the waiting-room;
One blurted out the needless information
That you were their 'papa.' The boys I left
Studying 'Punch'; their Aunt I carried off
To the small room upstairs, and learned enough
To make me think you an egregious ass;
Not for your marriage—I have seen your wife—
But for the method of it. Come to town.
Your two boys didn't miss their pantomime,
Small thanks to you. I called in Pimlico
On my way home, and stayed too long to save
The post last night. When I have written this,
I'm going off to tell your cousin Anne.
You've set a pretty kettle on to boil,

But, if you've sense left, we may get it off
With somewhat cleaner hands than you deserve.
Yours, S." This nasty missive in the post,
I drove off to my Sister's; told her all,
And carried her forthwith to Pimlico,
She seething all the way. It did so chance
We found our cousin in her drawing-room,
Prettier than I had pictured her; she stood
Duster in hand, and daintily set off
By a two-storied apron of some sort,
At work upon her china cabinet.
Anne, who 's an artist born, was caught at once
By her unconscious grace of attitude.
The introduction made, we all sat down;
But after a short time it dawned on me
That I had better leave them.

The next day

I called again in Hertford Street, found Anne
Raging at Jack's ineptitude, but keen
To champion his wife against the world.
The fortress of her pride had fallen as low
And speedier than the walls of Jericho—
I didn't mean that rhyme, but let it stay—
So we two sat, like Consuls in debate,

And were hard at it, when a head peered in,
And Master Jack transpired; I never saw
So fine a fellow look so big a fool.
After a while he brightened; "Dick," said he,
"I want to say your note was not too rough,
I could have borne a rougher." Whereon I
Felt like a brute, but thought 'twas on the whole
Too soon to own it; he had acted like
A fool of the first water, and 'twas well
To let self-condemnation simmer on.

The plan of our campaign was soon arranged;
One gleam of commonsense had pierced the clouds
Of Jack's fatuity, when he picked out
His friend and neighbour Francis Heringham
For confidant; got him to play "best man,"
And so had witness unimpeachable
To date his marriage down at home. We soon
Set Frank to work; then Anne herself went down,
And told Jack's housekeeper; old Mrs. Neath
Had been his nurse, and, as a thing of course,
Adored him in her age; she set things right
With all the other servants.

Much in short
Was done to make th' announcement in the 'Post'

Stale news; I wrote some comprehensive notes—
Not wholly complimentary to Jack,
But that was politic severity—
To some folks by whose judgment I set store,
And others, not so trustworthy or wise,
Whose comments might be damaging, if made
Without such guidance. In a month or two
Jack's house was taken out of curlpapers,
Curtains rehung, new chintzes here and there,
China and bronze unearthed and put about,
And other small sporadic changes made,
Till nought remained to mark through all the rooms
Save that becoming taste of dowdiness,
Akin to their condition and reserve,
Which suits old ladies and old country homes.
How like they are those two delightful things!
The best among the former call to mind
That pot-pourri enshrined in vase or bowl,
Which, thanks to their own delicate housewifery,
Becomes the genius of their analogues.
Their roses may be faded, crushed, and dry,
But round them in mysterious fragrance clings
Sweetness of habit and of character,
That more than compensates the loss of bloom.

Anne stayed there, working with as stern a will
 As old 'Bellona' ramming cartridges,
 And when our Jack, my Lady, and their boys
 Arrived one day in April, there she was,
 With all the household beaming in the rear,
 Posted on their hall steps to welcome them.
 Jack kissed his Nurse, so did his gentle wife;
 The good old woman hugged the boys, and wept;
 A housemaid whimpered, and that plunge was made.

With delicate reserve the kind folk round
 Left them to their belated homecoming;
 But by September cards of ceremony
 Lay thick as cream upon my Lady's table.
 Then did I what may seem superfluous,
 Or worse, dramatic. But remember, please,
 Jack was my nearest and my certain heir,
 Short of his death, and then there were the boys.
 I could not leave suspicion of a smirch
 Upon the Shirley shield, *ὁ πλεῖστα φιλῶ*.
 I have already hinted my resolve
 Never to marry—damn 'King Charles's head'!
 It rises up, as Shakespeare might have put it,
 To push us from our themes.—Well, any way,
 As soon as partridge shooting gave th' excuse,

I sent a score of invitations out
For a big house-party; I'd ground enough
This way and that, say, for a dozen guns.
Every one came—my motive was well known—
All seemed determined to be cordial;
The shooting promised well; the Sun played up;
Anne was superb; Jack quietly at ease;
His little wife just what she should have been,
Modest, well-mannered, with the air of one
Who had come lately, and with gentle joy
To take a place that thenceforth was her own.
I grinned with pleasure when I looked at her,
Timid, but happy, well, though simply, gowned,
With one or two good jewels; to wear none
Would have been affectation, while too many——

Dinner was loud and brisk enough, the Cook
Had risen to th' occasion, and our Binns
Did the right thing about the wines. Then came
What I had doubted over, but I did.
The servants gone, I pulled myself together,
Got up, and said, "Ladies and Gentlemen,
Forgive me for a most unusual thing;
I see here all those whom I chiefly love

Among my family and friends; we're met
First to enjoy our own good company,
And that we always do; (hear, hear) and next
'To bring the wild-fowl home,' as saith the ballad;
And that I trust we shall do; but besides,
There sits another purpose at my heart,
It is to ask your welcome to the Lady
Who honours my left hand. I don't propose
To sing her praises in her hearing now;
Suffice it, if I dare to prophesy
That she will prove a blessing to her own,
And add one to the many ornaments
That grace this county and my house to-night.
Sir John and Lady Wilmot, their good health!"
There followed general shouting of their names;
The men took down their claret handsomely;
The women sipped, and beamed with genuine
 smiles;
Old Lady Greveley whispered in my ear,
"You said just what was wanted, Dick; she'll do."
I pressed my old friend's hand. Then out spake
 Jack,
With cheeks far redder than some apples were,
That happened to be just in front of him;

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I don't deserve
This welcome, nor Lord Shirley's kindly words,
Nor all else done for my unworthy self;
Yet I don't much regard my poor desert,
Because I dare to say, though she is here,
My wife makes good her husband's shortcoming,
And is well worth it all. Both she and I
Thank you most heartily; we hope to live——”
But here the dear old Donkey broke off short,
And dropped into his chair; 'twas just as well.
The ladies rose; our good old Greveley wound
Her arm about my little Lady's waist,
And marched all down the room with her; pre-
cedence
Involved their separation near the door,
But some one else advanced, and took her on,
And so the line filed easily away.
They gone, the talk turned, as was natural,
On beats, and parties for the morrow's shoot,
Then came the ladies' hour, cigars, and bed.

So all went merrier than most marriage bells;
And as for little Janet, in her heart
She must have heard hers chiming all day long;

Anne left her, as a wise commander leaves
Freshly-joined levies, under moderate fire,
To their *baptême de feu*; or gardeners
Teach their geraniums and heliotropes
To bear exposure in their pots awhile,
Before committal to the open ground.
She went from Branscombe, as a young bird leaves
The nest, full fledged; but hang these metaphors!
As for the men, I softened all their hearts
With unexpected slaughter; through the week
I kept each manor driven ruthlessly,
And turnips, gorses, roughs, alive with birds;
This done, we walked them up of course; the bags
Were just six hundred brace for the five days,
As well as those picked up outside the counts.
I found it hard to reconcile my soul
To so much massacre; I never had
Too keen a taste for hecatombic sport;
Still, the birds died in a good cause; each man,
With sense of shared achievement, made for home;
And, such the reckless logic of content,
Was more than ready at a pinch to swear
That Lady Wilmot was a little brick,
And quite a credit to the country side.

Poor patient Jack, I had to put him through
Just one more dinner, as the Mothers put
The faces of their wretched children through
A second scrubbing for some village treat
Or school inspection—metaphor again!
A man's own class is not his world; outside,
A hum of judgment, very often just,
Nay, seldom wrong, save where insouciance
Leaves it without material, goes on.
There were the tenantry; some few of these
Had to be taken into confidence,
Informed, and started as Evangelists
Among the rest. My audit dinner came,
And Jack was there; Brand of the 'Dinner-bone'
As usual was spokesman; many a year
Old Richard's oratory had come round
Unchanged as the rotation of his crops,
Or—and I owe him this last simile—
The handwriting upon his cheque for rent;
But this one speech enclosed a variant;
"And now I come to drink Squire Wilmot's health;
We've known him, man and boy, and until now
There wasn't much was special, so to speak;
This year he's brought his gracious Lady down

To live amongst us all; we've seen enough
To know how we shall like her; and I'll say
The only quarrel that we've ever had
Against Sir John is just this little one,
He hasn't let us know her long before."

This was our Hero's last *épreuve*; perhaps
Some readers of this Chronicle may think
That Anne and I were prigs, that we contrived
By far too much, and that to cut, and cleave,
And undermine what never had a base,
Made us two priests set out to exorcise
A ghost of someone who had never lived;
Let such conceive what it had been to us
To leave behind us, when we came to die,
A Lady Shirley 'clouded with a doubt,'
As the old Laureate puts it; any way,
To every man his method, yours to you,
To others theirs; what I have told was ours
For starting Cousin Jack on the up-grade.

THE MARKHAMS

I AM no disbeliever in good blood,
 Or pride of race, provided that it sit,
 As sat King Arthur's Maiden of the Lake,
 Forging Excalibur, unheard, unseen,
 'Beneath the hidden bascs of the hills.'
 For hills read soul, for Arthur's Lake that still
 'Lago del cor' of our good Florentine—
 Whom when we quote there is no need to name—
 And for the famous blade, reclaimed by Heaven
 When the great uses of its loan were lost,
 A motive that shall hold our way for us
 Through all opposing cohorts in life's war,
 Whatever fears, enticements, casuistries
 Would bar, beset or lure us from the right.

But be it far from me to stand on terms
 With that effete small-headed arrogance,
 Last bastard of the decadence of caste,
 That walks with nostrils lifted, sneering lips,
 And eyelids lowered in scorn against the crowd;
 That parody of pride which stirs up hate

In all who come within its range, and brings,
'A mildewed ear blasting a wholesome brother,'
Dishonour on the worthier consciousness.
There's not a truth it dares not to defame,
A generous impulse that it would not thwart,
A natural yearning that it would not quench,
Hope, passion, heart, mind, soul, it would not crush,
Rend, stifle, martyrize, or trample down,
Rather than bate one jot of prejudice,
Or ruffle its self-love. Oh, I have seen it,
Loathed, scorned, defied, and, thank God! baffled it;
Notably once.

The Font de Lanes of Glayre,
Though country neighbours of my sister Anne,
Were never any friends of mine; I knew them,
But kept them at a good arm's length; their line
Had dwindled like their fortunes; He and She
Were those in fact from whom I just now drew
My sketch of what such people should not be,
And every word I've writ of them is true,
Save for the forgery of place and name.
They had two daughters only; the first-born
Was as themselves, or where she differed, worse.
The other was like Tarquin's youngest son,

If we may trust Macaulay, and why not?—
Too good for such a breed; bright, candid, keen,
And plucky as they make them; wits enough;
Fairly well read too; had a pretty gift
In water-colours; danced as few girls dance;
Was a tip-top musician; had a heart
To feel that Love is the red rose of life,
Albeit too often blighted or unblown;
With sense to know a good man when he came,
And will no less to take and stand by him.

Recalling her I had almost forgot
To say her looks were worthy of herself,
Not showy, but to my mind beautiful.
If she but turned her head, and spoke, and smiled,
You felt a soul was looking out on you;
And when she played or sang, you knew that soul
Was doing business on its own account,
And could not then be bothered with you, till
It ceased, spoke, smiled, and so was yours again.

Tom Markham was at Eton in my time,
My junior, and below me in the School;
I heard but little of him there, beyond
His promise as 'slow bowler' and a 'bat';

Moreover he left early to become
A cornet of dragoons; when next we met
He'd got his troop, and I had just begun
My very brief political career.
The two years' space between us, which had yawned
A gulf impassable at school, was now
The narrowest ditch, if ditch at all; we leaped
Straight into one of those quick intimacies
Which sometimes, being bred of accident,
Flash and burn out like variable stars;
But sometimes, as did ours, when brought about
By recognition of affinity,
A fact learned in a moment, which no speed
Of impact can make any less a fact,
Last on.

A month or two at most had passed
Before, one night, over a late cigar,
He told me of the passion that had grown
Between sweet Sybil Arden and himself;
How he had bearded that old Font de Lane,
Had borne his flouts, and those of his gaunt wife,
Faring no better with the elder girl,
To whom—a devilish forlorn hope—he turned.
The last was made more acid, it may be,

By envy that her sister, whom she loathed
For her acknowledged beauty, and her gifts
Of manners, mind, and nature, should have found
So fit and fine a man to mate withal:
For, as he leaned against my mantelpiece,
In glorious unconsciousness of grace,
I thought, 'If lost Apollo were reborn
To make a late descent on Berkeley Square,
Dressed in a suit of evening clothes by Poole,
He'd look uncommonly like you.' 'Tis strange
Seeing how many hate the personal gifts
They have not, most of all good looks, that I,
With my shock head and nutmeg-grating face,
Should dote on physical beauty, as I do,
In men no less than women; ever since
I read Herodotus I've sympathized
With those good Egestaeon folk who built
A temple to Philippus of Crotona,
Simply because he was so beautiful.

I heard Tom's tale through every fact and phrase;
Save for the Font de Lanian insolence,
It had no special note; the weakest point
In my friend's case was fortune; for his birth,
Though decent, was no asset, no set off

To poverty; he had bought all his Steps,
But, beyond what his captaincy might fetch,
If he sold out, he had but little left.
Perhaps, all told, there was six thousand pounds.
She would have nothing from old Font de Lane;
That he swore roundly, and his lady backed him;
The sister sat and chuckled; she would get,
And knew it, should her parents' malice hold,
The lands uncharged with the substantial sum
Her sister's portion would have laid on them;
For, as it seemed, the old folk had the right,
Under some power, to stay their churlish hands,
Forebear to make appointment, and so leave
The child with whom they quarrelled destitute. *
By great good luck, our Sybil had an Aunt
Who, to her credit, picked her out to get
A poor three thousand pounds she had to leave.
This would be Sybil's on majority,
In spite of her sweet relatives.

Tom's plan

Was emigration to Australia;
That, in the times I write of, for a girl
Of Sybil's nurture, gifts, and gentle grace,
Was to my thinking an experiment,

As parsons say of marriage, and with reason,
By no means lightly to be taken in hand.
The Captain caught my whistle of debate,
And said at once, "Should you much mind, old
chap,

Having a talk with Sybil? she's prepared;
She knows I meant to tell you."

I've confessed

My taste for meddling in my friends' affairs;
In those days it was stronger; I suppose
Like other passions it decays with age.
Not that they all decay by any means;
Love in a dozen shapes remains and grows.
First, there is that heart-hunger, keen and pure,
Clarified love, etherialized desire,
As different from youth's feverish plague, as airs
We breathe upon a moorland from the faint
Half-fetid atmosphere that overbears
In some hot theatre or county Ball
The perfumes that are worn for its disguise.
Then there's the love for knowledge of all kinds,
That broadens when our physical decay
Leaves leisure for our larger aptitudes.
How does our love of landscape deepen, how

Our joy in stream and meadow; e'en in clouds,
Scarce born ere they begin to lose their forms,
Absorbed into the unpolluted skies,
As children, fading from their cradle, pass
And reascend into their native Heaven.
How does it swell, that comfortable sense
Of common life and boundless fellowship
With Mother Earth and her vast progeny,
From the great Oak, of whose perennial span
I'm somewhat envious, through every form
Of bush or flower, as Solomon would say,
Down to the hyssop springing from the wall.
As to birds, beasts, and fishes, wild or tame,
They are our poor relations, taken up
As we grow old, after too long neglect.
I'm not so sure of insects, or of snakes—
We must have still our small hostilities—
But draw the line at hairy caterpillars,
And, *pace* Robert Bruce, at spiders too.
Of toads I have my doubts; I knew one once
For some three seasons; he had scooped a cave
Just underneath an Araucaria
Set round with mignonette and heliotrope,
And, when I came his way, would show his mask

To get a sprinkle from my watering hose.
I liked his round appealing eyes; perhaps
A fellow feeling for his ugliness
Drew me to make of him a summer friend.
One year I looked for him but found him not,
He probably had died, or, it may be,
Had married, and had set up house elsewhere.
Robins I've known in plenty, and of these,
One beyond others; he would challenge me
From the same pine bough on my daily way
Down to the lower garden; he could stand
Anne's children, or a man, but women, no.
One in particular he loathed—but, stop;
No more of her, to-day at all events.
To sum up this digression, Love remains
Last and most blessed of all our faculties,
Active, diverse in object as in form,
Its youthfulness made mellow by our age,
To hallow and console us until Death
Breaks up the battered home that harboured it.

The gift of dining is a grace divine,
And charily bestowed; Plato suggests
That hosts, and guests, and tables, such as those
At and by which and whom the good talk grew

To the 'Republic' and 'Symposium,'
Were rarities in Athens; Pliny too
Conveys no less of his more dainty days;
And Mr. Shakespeare, speaking through the mouth
Of one, no less the most unfortunate
Than widely known of all Financiers,
Hints that the standard of the Dining Art
Among the best of Venice at her best,
(As haply of the London of his time,)
Was lamentably low; the blunt curt phrase,
'I will not eat with you nor drink with you,
Though I will buy, sell, talk, and walk with you,'
Expresses far too well, e'en in our days,
The inmost thought that surges in our hearts,
However gently we may smother it,
At least on nine occasions out of ten.
But thanks to Heaven the blessed tenth remains;
And this reserve of reverence makes me bold
To say, though still perchance with something like
The roughness of our old Shakespearian friend,
I hate all London entertainments, save
Dinners of twelve or under, eight for choice.
For these, no more than those of solitude,
Three courses are essential, a clear soup,

Followed by any cleanly-treated fish,
Except that travesty of salmon, trout ;
One entrée, if needs must, and then a bird ;
I reckon hares as birds, dining alone,
But not in company ; a well-kept hare
Has two redeeming qualities, no more,
The slices lying next his vertebrae ;
And these should be removed by an old spoon ;
Steel is as fatal to their quality,
As is temptation to man's innocence ;
Old must the spoon be, *tempo* George the Third,
At least, because much rubbing and long use
Will just have made its edges sharp enough
To scoop a trench neatly along the bone.
No after-blast of sweet or savoury
Should vex the calm of such a meal ; for drink,
Except on rare occasions, I prescribe
An honest pint of Bordeaux, which should be
The very best your purse can buy ; I hold
That no man, save the most ill-mannered fool,
Affronts good meats by sending low-class wines
To keep them company ; I had as lief
Bid a man dine to meet his bootmaker.
I said Bordeaux, for Burgundy I find

Somewhat aggressive; as the Frenchmen own,
C'est un vin capiteux; the best of Hock
Makes *me* sour, if it be not sour itself;
Champagne's a saucebox, full of bubbling life,
Companionable, lavish, unreserved,
As are its laughing human analogues,
But falling flat, as they do, very soon;
Nor it nor they are for man's daily food;
Bordeaux is like the woman one would choose
To make a wife of. Such light wholesome fare,
Interpolated with good easy talk
Of folk who could be deeper than they show,
(Digestion suffers from profundity,)
Is the one social gift that London holds
For quiet folk; and I may add that he
Who dined like that habitually, and walked,
Say, seven miles day by day throughout the year,
Need never die.

All this is a long prelude
To a most simple statement that one night,
Most unaccustomedly, I found myself,
But not without set purpose, be you sure,
Seated with Sybil in a balcony
Among the palms at some high-pressure Ball;

A dowager or two and some smart folk
Had passed and seen us, and next day, no doubt,
Their tongues were busy with a combination
In which the Captain was not even named.
I heard her story; felt she meant it all;
Promised co-operation; and went off
Pledged to accept a seat upon the Board,
Or, say, the post of Managing Director,
As in these modern days it would be called,
Of a great Markham-Arden marriage scheme.

I wrote to our Dragoon, and Berkeley Square
Forthwith became the focus of a plot;
Markham's commission was as good as sold,
And fetched far more than Regulation price—
Thank Goodness, those were pre-Cardwellian days—
The Captain next behind him was well off,
And jumped at the promotion, so our man
Was ready now to send his Papers in.
But more remained; the Lady had gone home,
And thence had written furtively to say
That she was watched; but in a week we found,
Much to our comfort as conspirators,
The drift of the espionage; the news
Of 'Sybil's happy evening' at that Ball

Had fluttered all the doves, save one, at Glayre
With hopes too good to let them run the risk
Of Markham's intervention; 'The dear Girl
Must be kept safe for Shirley'; quick as thought
I bustled off to Anne in Hertford Street,
And, for the first and only time, deceived her.
Dear thing, her one dream outside her home life
Was to see me a married man; I knew,
And, like a mean brute, worked upon her wish;
'Twas many a day before she let me off,
Not for the trick so much as its success.
I simply said, "Invite that Arden girl
To come to town and spend a week with you."
She asked no question, but sat down at once,
Radiant with joy and triumph premature,
Waving her pen; scribbled a note, whose terms,
I dare say, made its fair recipient stare;
Rang for a servant, and turned fronting me,
A statue of content. She too had heard
Of that damned balcony, and thought she saw
Me standing at the Altar rails; I'd caught
Her and the Font de Lanes all at one cast.

But 'Why deceive her?' you may say; 'Why not
Make her, so large of heart, so full of brains,

A co-conspirator in the great cause?’
The answer’s simple; Anne’s good husband was
A trifle over cautious, and a mule,
A dear old mule, to boot; a woman’s help
Was indispensable, and Anne alone
Was to my hand; she would not have come in
Without her husband, and that animal—
The Lord forgive me for so styling him—
Would have lashed out with both his honest heels,
If asked to flout his neighbour Font de Lanc;
So poor dear Anne had to be done, and was.
Sybil was bound to have a house of call
Between her father’s place in Derbyshire
And Brighton, where her lover’s regiment
Was quartered; such a journey at that time
Was overlong to compass in one day;
Besides, she had to go from train to church;
Marriages then must be before mid-day.
So up she came, another innocent;
No rumour of the rumours about me
Had reached her; those thrice blessed relatives
Were far too knowing to impart to her
What they had heard; she told her gentle self
‘That Anne was what boys now call ‘in the swim,’

And wrote an answer by return of post
Flashing all through with sparks of gratitude,
Such as young lovers show and doubtless feel
Toward those from whom they hope for countenance,
And all of these Anne in her turn misread.

I duly went and dined in Hertford Street,
The night of her arrival; was told off
To take her into dinner; saw with glee
My unsuspecting sister's clever play
To keep four outside guests round her own chair,
And leave the smaller drawing-room for us.
These good folk also thought they saw the game;
So famous was that cursed balcony,
It beat the old historic article
In Romeo and Juliet into fits!
The Mule was taken in. It seemed but fair
That I, the sole purveyor of the fun,
Should have it to myself, though patentees
Don't always reap the profits of their patents.

Sybil was puzzled, as, indeed, she had been
Since her arrival; Anne had welcomed her
With gush mysterious as immoderate;
For not a word of Markham passed her lips,
While a full hour, before the dressing-bell

Sent them upstairs, had been bestowed on me,
My merits, and achievements, since the days
Of nursery and schoolroom until then.
I was constrained to let her know the truth,
But altogether unprepared to meet
Her genuine distress. Anne must be told
That very night; she could not stay and take
A hand in the deceit; I must see that.
I did; the truth that flashed from those clear eyes
Was damnably converting; she declared
She'd rather go straight back to Glayre next day,
Than help to make a fool of Lady Anne.
I was struck dumb, and, as the Yankees say,
I own I never felt, before or since,
'So mean a man'; not all her gratitude
Could make her yield upon the vital point,
Anne must be told at once.

At last she rose,
Just as the rest were leaving, and, they gone,
Pleading fatigue, she left me to my task.
My sister was impressive; until then
I had not plumbed her depths of dignity.
I only scored two strokes in a long game;
She did believe in the poor girl's good faith,

And further promised not to tell the Mule—
Who had gone off to smoke a lone cigar—
For one clear day, but after that, the deluge.
How the two women managed to keep off
The subject till they parted, I can't tell;
Suffice it that they did part friends; Anne's kiss
Of farewell, so the sobbing Sybil said
When on our way to Brighton, was as warm
As her first welcome; nay, my traveller
Did so far play the traitor as to own
She started with a tear upon her cheek
That was not hers. Incomparable Anne!

The pretext for abruptly cutting short
Her visit was that she was summoned home
Through sudden illness of old Font de Lane;
This satisfied the Mule; it mattered not
What outside busybodies thought or said,
Or the Mule either, for that matter, when
The truth forthcoming in the 'Morning Post'
Would dissipate all mystery. As 'twas,
This fiction gave time for an incident
Which brought me no small comfort, worked delight
For Sybil, and made Markham's honest eyes
Brim up in most unmanly plenitude.

The Northern train which we had *not* to catch
Started before its Southern congener;
This left poor Sybil and my guilty self
An hour to kick our heels at London Bridge;
And gave moreover all the needful time
For someone else to clinch a bright idea
That Sybil, being innocent of fraud,
Ought not to stand alone in Brighton Church
Among a group of men—for Markham's friends
Were sure to rally there—with me alone
For escort, and without some female friend
Of mark and standing unimpeachable,
To sanction her defiance of the world.

Anne seldom wastes her time in doubt; her Maid,
Summoned, brought out her premier travelling dress;
She caught our train with ease, went down alone—
Sea was her wrath yet seething after storm,
As someone else has said—and while we turned
To take our seats in Markham's chartered trap,
He'd sent a pair of horses, poor old boy,
She sailed up smiling and superb, as trim
As a new yacht at Cowes. She bent and kissed
The flabbergasted Sybil, but to me
Vouchsafed her shortest nod; as she sat down

She dropped some banal scrap of bridal luck
And a fine day; I bore my little snub
The easier that I saw the women sat
With clasped hands through the drive.

We reached the Church,
And as we made our way along the Nave,
I blest our Anne with all my heart, for there
Stood Markham in the Chancel, almost lost
Amid a group of eight or ten dragoons
All taller than himself. There was just time
For a hushed round of whispered presentations,
Before the Parson entered; as I gave
The Bride away, I thought of Font de Lane,
And very nearly marred, with what had been
An unforgiveable and fatuous smile,
The general reverence.

At the York Hotel
Tom's Colonel and his well-bred comely wife
Were waiting us, with luncheon ready laid.
It was all well and plainly done; no fuss,
No noise, no sentiment; the Soldier Lads
Were simply perfect, and the Colonel's wife
Hung smiling in the little galaxy,
A moonlike pendant to my planet Anne;

Her husband, with some gentlemanlike words,
Drank to the Bride and Bridegroom in Champagne;
Markham was pleasant, manly, serious,
In his response. There was that element
Of venture and defiance in their act,
That made a quiet earnest sympathy
Displace the vulgarized hilariousness
Of wedding breakfasts. Then the rest went off,
After a round of hearty handshaking,
Concluded by a motherly embrace
Of Sybil by the Colonel's wife; we two,
Anne and myself, alone stayed on awhile;
But after a brief talk and long farewells,
We left them to themselves; on the way up
I had my lecture; strove to make my peace;
More than half failed, and failing, fell asleep.

The Markhams were to start in ten days' time,
And I was to rejoin them in the Docks,
Sail with them down the Thames, and round the
Coast,

And through the Solent, leaving them at last
When the ship dropped her Pilot, as ships did,
Outside Hurst Castle by the Needles point.
All this I did; how I recall it still;

Our vessel's laboured passage through the Gates,
Like some large woman's through a carriage door;
And, as her head swung round into the stream,
The prospect of the busy Pool above,
The barges, lighters, wherries, dancing round
The wharves and jetties, basins, entrances,
Like hovering bees along a line of hives;
Below, the brimming waters of that flood
Whose fairway gives a welcome to the world.
Seawards, her sails close-furled on her gaunt yards,
A giantess with arms a-kimbo, stalked
Our mighty hull, sedate and effortless,
Obedient to her fussy little 'Tug,
As blinded Samson to the pagan boy
Who led him by the hand. She reached the Nore
Just before sundown; shook her canvas out,
And stood to sea. We three sat up on deck,
Watched the soft rose o'erspread the western sky,
Above the canopy of serious haze
That o'er Earth's mightiest haven ever hangs;
Then went below and fed; came up again,
And talked out half the night beneath the stars.

With no retort of bitterness or blame
They told me far more fully than I knew

What both had suffered from the Font de Lanes.
Parents and sister, it appeared, had vied
In spiteful and injurious insolence
To him, and cruelty to her; one gem
Alone I save, her father's; the last pearl
Of a long chaplet in a missive penned
By way of answer to her letter home
Written the morrow of her marriage; hers—
They made me read a copy they had kept—
Was neither curt nor overlong, no cant,
No self-abasement, no appeal, but couched
In terms respectful, measured, dutiful,
So far as naked disobedience
Can clothe itself with duty by mere words.
But, if hers were revolt in masquerade,
His was all native savagery, bared,
Without a stitch to keep it from the cold.
He started with a pompous eloquence
Worthy of one who played the double rôle
Of outraged father and of noble Earl;
But after a brief paragraph or two
The grand style failed him; he grew common-
place;
And sinking to his native form, became

At once outspoken and more natural.
There was a certain skill in his abuse
Of Markham, if indeed the fancy sketch
Of what he called his victim's character,
When critically sifted, showed aught else
Than spite that 'sings but as the linnet sings,'
To satisfy its own sweet self; yet still,
I could not dower with spontaneity
One highly wrought suggestion that 'perhaps,
Nay, in all probability, she'd find
In the unprincipled adventurer
Who had determined to ally himself
With one so highly placed, for the mere love
Of vulgar self-aggrandizement, a man
Who, having once achieved his low-bred aims,
Would kick aside the ladder he had climbed,
And all unfitted for the height attained,
Would weary both of it and her, hark back
Regretful towards the milieu he had left,
And hankering for a natural mate, look out
For something meaner and more suitable.'
I own I saw a purpose in all this;
It seemed a variant of Brabantio's thrust,
So devilish and prophetic in one sense,

“ Look to him, Girl, if thou hast eyes to see,
He hath deceived thy parents, and may thee.”
The more, perhaps, because he followed up
His precious innuendo with the words
That closed this very fatherly farewell;
“ And so we part, never to meet again;
If half of what I augur come to you,
Look not to those on whom you turn your back;
Your olden life is done, your olden home
Has barred for ever its abandoned doors,
Doors that perhaps you meant to leave ajar.
To use a common phrase, you have yourself
Made your own bed, and you must lie on it;
I cannot pray that it may not be hard.
Your father, Font de Lane.”

“ We know,” said I,

Handing them back the letter, “ that soft words
Butter no parsnips, and it’s not less true
That hard ones break no bones. If I’m a judge,
Your lot will lie in very pleasant lines;
You start with a fair cargo on life’s voyage;
Love, youth, and health, adventure, novelty,
With money to ensure a livelihood
Which prudence need not knit her brows over,

Nor your well-bred simplicity disdain;
I own I envy you"!

The moment came

When at the close of three days' summer sail
Our vessel hove to just beyond the Hurst;
The glory of the noon, the flapping sails
That showed against the breast of the blue heaven
As white as its own clouds, the gulls that dipped
And wheeled and soared, the lisp of the light waves
Below us on our counter, ranged themselves,
Like friends, to lend a grace to our good-byes;
I kissed the white hand of my little friend,
And, as I bent to it, I framed a prayer
That no hard work might ever coarsen it;
Her blue eyes overflowed, good Markham's too
Were fuller than they should have been; my own—
I always was a sentimental fool—
Were in that state when backs are better turned.
The kindly skipper saw me to the steps,
Whence I swung over to the Pilot boat
Rocking below them; in a trice the helm
Went round, the sails refilled; when I looked up
There were some yards between us; many a wave
Of cap and handkerchief were interchanged,

Until we dropped behind the veiling Hurst,
And three full hearts were echoing, "Never more"!

Markham's first letter came next Whitsuntide
To Branscombe, more than five months after date,
Where Anne and I, their children, and the Mule,
Were keeping house; that worthy Hybrid is
The shot predominant among my friends;
He is essentially an Autumn man;
I never feel so much at home with him,
As when I see him quietly at work
Among the tallest pheasants he can pick
Down in some dell where every thing comes high;
But in the summer months he's rather dull,
He does not care one hang for fly-fishing,
And good as is his eye, it cannot see
Far into a stone wall; it puzzled him
For days to 'make out how the deuce it was
That Markham should have found five thousand
pounds,
Waiting him in the Melbourne Bank, beyond
The price of his commission and his wife's
Three thousand;' I began to fear at last
He might communicate his wonderment

To alien ears; so Anne enlightened him.
She said, poor Mule, he brayed aloud for joy,
And wanted to let on at me; but that
His wife nipt, as a frost nips dahlias
In mid October.

The recipients

Of this mysterious item, in their turn,
Gave me some sport for it; at first the pair
Were half inclined to think old Font de Lane
Had so far melted, though too stubborn still
To let his late repentance face the light.
I trust I am a Christian, but, by Jove,
I could not meekly hold my tongue, and see
That miserly old tyrant credited
With any vagrant virtuousness of mine;
So when I answered Markham, I just said,
“Mollification and five thousand pounds
Are two ingredients that find no place
In the concoction of a certain Peer
Whom I forbear to name.”

The next attack

Came from our little Sybil's fair white fist;
She struck straight out; “I know there is but one,
And he the dearest man in all the world,

Save one, who would have thought," *et cetera*.
I parried that by spinning a long yarn
Of London gossip, with our Branscombe news;
Anne's growing girls; and Roderick Murchison's,
As we thought then, audacious prophecy
Of gold discoveries in Australia,
And how I hoped some of the wealth foretold
Might underly their holding. One more bout
She tried, by telling me how they had built
Their house and homestead, made a mile of road,
And done it all with very special care
To keep it just within five thousand pounds,
Naming their new possession 'Shirleyholm';
"That's what we love to call it; you know why"!
I once more turned her blade aside, expressed
Acceptance of the *rôle* of Eponym,
But trusted 'holm' was not confused with 'home,'
In her imagination; bade her know
That 'holm' meant 'holly,' and that Ilex trees—
Whose presence as arboreal colonists
Of Melbourne town I was surprised to learn—
Were known as 'holm-oaks' from their foliage.
Thus baffled twice, she let the matter drop;
But, in despite of etymology,

She stuck to 'Shirleyholm,' though, as it chanced
And much to their advantage, not for long.

Old Murchison's prediction stopped the run
Of bad luck that all prophets have sustained
From Delphi and Dodona until now;
And its fulfilment prosperously cut short
The early need that Sybil had to cry,
As cry she did, the plucky little soul,
Her milk and butter through the streets of Mel-
bourne.

From all their letters of those harder times
I call to mind one single incident,
And that, as I believe, the very last;
It hints how many another may at whiles
Have brought the good blood flushing to her brow.

It seems that in the first barbaric days
Of the gold harvest, outside some Hotel
Or House of Call, a group of miners spied
The pretty huckstress with her little cart,
And one of them, out of sheer rollick, paid
A nugget for a draught of milk; this drunk,
He offered her another for a kiss;
Quicker than thought she boxed his ears; the fool,
Stung by the blow, or with the shame of it,

Rushed forward, looking like revenge; whereon
A friend, with instincts finer than his own,
Handily intervening, laid him low.
When he rose swearing, half a dozen arms
Were round him; in the *melée* she escaped,
Leaving a pound of butter for his bruise.
But Markham after this kept her at home,
And Melbourne knew the little cart no more;
Soon far and wide the greedy city flung
Its craving arms; the land that they had bought
For shillings by the acre, sold for pounds
By the square yard, and in a year or two
They were made rich, but 'Shirleyholm' was gone.

When this was known, for they wrote home to me,
And sent me forth on many a pleasant quest,
Books, music, furniture, and ornaments,
That all betokened wealth and taste—while I
Took care to spread their fame and fortunes round—
Old Font de Lane, whose better half was dead,
And elder daughter ailing, had the sense
To want them back; they answered the demand
In terms as kindly as was consonant
With firm refusal. In a while he died;
So did the daughter, and our Sybil was

Owner of Glayre; I sent her out the news,
Adding some hints of what I thought might be
Her duty as an English Landowner.
But nothing would induce her to come home,
Or to assume the name; Markham she was,
And Markham she intended to remain.
Her life, as she esteemed it, but began
After her marriage; to return and take
Her place in the great world, was to commit
A 'gran rifiuto' of the destiny
Whereto with solemn purpose she felt pledged,
As surely as a priestess to her vows.
So wrote she in effect, if not in words,
And Markham backed her in a postscript, thus;
"We owe our fortunes to our colony,
She is our mother by adoption, we're
Her children, and with her will live and die."

On one point only would she yield; her Boy,
My godson, and the Squire of Glayre to be,
Should when the time arrived, be sent to me,
And filter through those strainers of young life,
The Public School and University,
That make the Pronaos to the great Nave

For youngsters born as he was—on my soul,
That was a jump of metaphor! I'm worse
Than one of those most troublesome of hacks
Who mar their canter by a change of feet—
He came, and justified my guardianship;
Passed well through Eton; then went home awhile;
Returned, and took his Bachelor's degree;
Lived modestly at Glayre, and was to me
Much as a son; until the fated day,
Came, and he too was married, and right well.
Since then he shares with Wilmot, and the Mule,
And one or two whom I perchance shall name,
The run of such among my heart-preserves
As have not been fenced off by memories,
Or are not let on lease to Sister Anne.

MY LADY

OLD age, as it advances, brings to us
 An Indian summer of the heart and mind,
 And sadder is than curiosity
 The mood impelling us to speculate
 How long the gentle season may endure.
 I never loved anticipation much,
 It slays the present and despoils the past;
 'Look forward' suits that section of the wise
 Whose passion is success; for us, whose creed
 Is either formed on failure, or embraced
 After achievement, who in either case,
 Yearn to enjoy, and hanker for repose,
 Our mottoes are 'The present and the past,'
 'Circumspice et respice'; to us
 The future is a lamp whose wick is dry;
 An ignis-fatuus that has ceased to lure;
 Prognostic would be waste of precious hours;
 Our business is with what we have and had;
 Out-door enticements while the weather holds,

With books and retrospect for rainy days
And after dark; and of these retrospect
For choice, life's sacred hoard of pain and joy;
With or without a pen in hand; nor least
To be recorded in our catalogue
Of delicacies, sleep, that pearl-like studs,
Recurrent priceless, life's chain of hours.
Not that we make the most of Memory;
For ever and anon we tread its halls,
Turn inside out some worn discarded mask,
Or kick aside, with due contempt and shame,
The rotting caps and rusty bells of Folly;
But who of us e'er lifts a pious hand
To cleanse the Marbles, fair but few, alas!
Busts of the Virtues, statuettes of Graces,
And wreaths long faded, that stand round inch deep
Under the dust of long abandonment?

I doubt if any man who's worth the name
Lives out a long life never having loved;
I take no count of fancies, slender, brief;
Offsets of soul that garnish and decay;
Branchlets short-lived, such as the hasty pine
Sends out as it strides upward, but disowns
Season by season, and which neither leave

A knot within its unaffected heart,
Nor scar th' unblemished bark of after years.
I draw another image from the pines
To symbolize the love I would recall:
Two stems rise singly side by side, they make
Together, to philosophizing eyes,
After long years of sunny neighbourhood,
A married form, on all sides full and fair,
In flawless outline; one falls sick and dies,
Or, by some fatuous freak of forestry,
Is felled; its partner is left standing there,
And over half its circuit flourishes;
But on that desolated side, where once
The consort it has lost and cherished stood,
It shows no branch, will never hazard one,
Bare is it, and will be for ever bare.

I never knew the Lady that I loved
Before her marriage, and rejoice to add
The knowledge that I loved her came to me
After her husband's death; the startling news
Broke in upon my heart as suddenly
As the first unmistakable attack
Of tempest breaks the unsuspecting calm
Of summer, with an ominous sough that scarce

Gives warning, ere the storm itself rolls up
To drown the notes of its first harbinger;
Or as some vanguard, hurrying its advance,
Engulphs its masking cloud of skirmishers
Ere they have time to make their office felt.

It chanced on this wise: in my early days,
Before the marriage of my sister Anne,
I went down into Warwickshire; the house
I purposely don't mention; I intend
To give no clue in this one chronicle
To any of the actors; I shall tell
My secret, but keep theirs inviolate.
It was the usual December week,
Three days of pheasant-shooting and a Ball;
But, as it chanced, and as my pleasure went,
One of those dull occasions that will come
E'en to the most adaptable of men—
Which I was not—when he may find himself
Out of the main flow of the cheerful stream
Beside him.

I was stranded; so was He,
One of the nameless actors in my tale,
Not, like myself, by his own fault. For Him
His fate had been perverse enough to weave

Forced isolation. Born a younger son,
With no especial prospects, he was sent
As Gentleman Cadet to Addiscombe—
Those were the days of old 'John Company'—
Passed into the Artillery, he went out
To India in due course; served with success
In several campaigns; held more than one
Administrative and outlying post,
Where exile from his fellows wrought with him,
As with so many Anglo-Indians,
To aggravate by solitude a strain
Of brooding habit native to the man.
When tidings of his only brother's death
Surprised him tracking tigers all alone
In some unwholesome jungle of Bengal,
He left few friends behind him, and came home
To find himself with none or next to none.
Climate, hard service, and the reckless love
Of perilous sport, all working on a frame
None too robust at best, had rendered him
More than half invalid, and sown the seeds
Of that disease which slew him at the last.
But I anticipate; he had come back
Ten months before I met him; his first Spring

In England had been strangely long and bleak,
And scarce atoned for by some summer months
Long famous for their heat and brilliancy.
'Twas part of that strange rashness which besets
The victims of his malady, to hazard
The weather of our Midlands at the time
I thus encountered him; too ill to shoot
For two days of the three, his substitute
Had to be found, while a funereal cough,
Like Hamlet's Ghost, made his nights hideous,
As I, who had my lodgement next to his,
Knew to my cost. I soon made friends with him.
In my quick way; took him to task forthwith,
And lectured him like an old maiden aunt,
Persuading him by the week's end to go
Straight to Mentone; whence he came next May,
And looked me up at once in Berkeley Square,
Mended a bit, but not less surely doomed.

As afterwards with Markham, so with him;
Before mid June we were close-knit, and, since
In my experience intimacy means
That I am used as an emporium
For love-sick revelation, I had heard,
And more than once too, for my many sins,

The gradients from those deeps where wounds heal
not,

Through stages where they do, up to the plane
Where pangs are very slight or none at all.
Her girlish eyes soon dried; she was brought out,
Presented; her too fragile loveliness
Laid open all the London drawing-rooms,
Wherethrough she wandered at her gracious will,
A rivulet among meadows; not for long;
She was too fair a prize to stay unclaimed;
Some of the rash sort suffered for their sin,
Being dismissed with costs and contumely,
But ere her second season closed, she married.

Her husband was her Mother's choice, not hers;
Yet, not a bad one; he had many gifts
Which made him highly recommendable,
But more perhaps to chaperons than their girls.
First, he was tall, though of a clumsy build;
Next, he was comely; with large honest eyes,
Somewhat too womanish; a well-cut face,
Faultless but feeble; and a constant smile,
Whose graciousness was marred by little airs
Of patience, toleration, and fatigue,
Born of a maddening self-complacency.

The man had brains, but not enough to see
That others could be clever, though he were.
I ought to add that he was scholarly,
And cultivated in more ways than one;
But he took rank with those unfortunates
Whose merits irritate, and who enhance
By contrast the outrageous luck of those
Innumerable over-favoured scamps
Who make a passport of their faults; I think
That in his case, as in a hundred others,
A lack of humour slurred his thoroughness.
In short, as I look back on him, he looms
Large, handsome, clever, and a gentleman,
Warm-hearted, e'en chivalrous, but a bore.
'Twas well for him that, being such an one,
His honour was in holy keeping; Her
No sense of disillusion, weariness,
Or craving for unsatisfied ideals,
Not e'en contempt, could ever have drawn down
From that pure empyrean where she moved
Self-guarded, strong, serene in charity,
Angelic peace, and true unconscious pride.
I cannot even now enforce myself
To give her portrait; that would be to me

A dereliction of a sacred trust,
The flinging open of a virgin shrine
That has been closed for half a century,
A treason to my heart that holds her fast
As a mysterious relic it may guard,
Love, worship, but must keep for ever sealed.

I find I've overshot my narrative,
Or written it as though I knew at starting ;
What later accident disclosed ; my Friend
Had all the scruples of a well-bred man,
And did not sin by playing with her name,
But left me to divine it. Now, I trust
That none of those who read this chronicle
Will label me as purist if I own
That his confession shocked me ; all the more
Because I trusted him, as one to whom
The vulgar forms of treachery and vice
Were unattributable ; many a time
Before that evening which revealed to me
The object of his passion, I held forth
Unsparingly on the whole tribe of men
Who, whether of deliberate villainy,
Or from a fibreless lack of self-restraint,
Set, or permit, themselves, I care not which,

To sap the peace and honour of a woman:
His vows of high resolve and innocent aim,
Respect, reserve, and distant worship, were
As nothing with me; I had studied such,
And all their many-headed variants,
In that astonishing congeries,
That Mons Testaceus of moral shards,
All broken fragments of the seventh and best
Of the Mosaic Table, which debase
The name "French Novel"; bags of bran they
 seemed
Flung in a balance 'gainst Schiehallion's mass,
So huge the wrong that piled the counter scale.
And yet I sank, of sheer fatuity,
That wellnigh makes me gnash my teeth to-day,
Even to plead for him, and that to Her;
Because I loved, believed, and pitied him,
And let my love, my pity and my trust
Silence my sounder hate of my own plea.

Chance soon disclosed her; one night He and I
Stood listless units in a languid crowd
About to climb the stairs of some great house;
I saw him turn, and heard him catch his breath,
As she came near; one look at each sufficed

To tell me who she was and what to him,
And how he too was nothing in her eyes.
His was the steadiness of self-command
As of a well-trained soldier ; but, for Her,
There was no touch of effort in her ease,
No finish, no achievement ; her grave look,
While she advanced to us and greeted him,
Warmed into unembarrassed friendliness,
And passed with a suave transference to me
A moment later ; She went on, and we
Soon parted, for our hostess bore me off
Reluctant to where some neglected girl
Sat pleading entertainment.

Duty done,

I gained the hall once more, strolled off alone,
And heedless of the beauty of the night,
Affronted her pure skies with flippant rings
Of vapour from an unabashed cigar ;
Musing on miasmatic hopes that match,
In desecration of the purity
Whose skirts they cannot reach but outrage still,
Tobacco's insult to the virgin moon.
I own that, as I walked, my musing took
A shape in which sheer silliness made up

For any lack of baser self-deceit;
'She is,' thought I, 'a woman as to whom
A good man might win pardon from his kind
For counting her a gift of fortune worth
Riding to ruin for, if only he
Might ride alone, and leave her safe behind.

Before mid-August came to set us free
From Parliament, I had grown intimate
With Her and with her husband, and took note
How never once I met Him as their guest—
Please, note too, any eyes to whom these come,
How, *vice* names, I summon capitals
To designate the actors in this drama—
The cause of that abstention on his part,
For such it was, was not then clear to me,
To my confusion and my shame; and yet
I surely knew enough to make it clear.
A mere boy when he sailed for India,
He made his first and natural mistake;
He judged her feelings by his own; What then?
'Thousands of older men before his day,
And since, and women too, both old and young,
Have done the like, and doing it, have framed
A confraternity of ridicule

That shall endure till Folly be no more.

He made of his delusion his heart's friend,
The brooding comrade of his exiled years,
His spiritual bride; no dream, but truth
Subjective, if objectively a lie;
A haunting semblance of reality
More sacred than the memory of loss;
A phantom ceaselessly at work to weave
A fillet round the brain from which it sprang,
Binding and blinding past all change or cure.

The letters that announced her marriage wrought
No change in his belief; there is no creed
That holds like the love-mania; it enslaves
Not heart or mind, but both; perverts, absorbs
Assimilates; finds nutriment in facts
That should be fatal, as the Pontian culled
A diet out of poisons; change the image,
And say that, like a treacherous armourer,
It welds the proofs, that should have hammered out
Emancipation, to fresh gyves and chains.

So, like the strong man in the parable,
His house usurped, as by a trespasser
Too obstinate for Reason to eject,
He lived in thralldom to his fixed belief

That He and She were one in martyrdom;
And very soon he claimed her fellowship;
Which she with no less promptitude refused.
Mad though she thought him, she forbore to laugh;
He was too sad and grave for ridicule,
And, spite of his persistence, treated her
With so much of a delicate reserve,
That, knowing what she knew of his despair,
And of his fathomless belief in hers,
To say naught of her knowledge of herself,
She could but spare, forbear, and pity him.

As for myself, all I have here set down
As to their true relations, came to me
In our late confidences—Hers and mine—
After His death; in making it clear now
I overstride the traces of my story,
As I am prone to do; the latest form
His madness took, wherein I had a share,
Seized him before he started, towards the close
Of his last autumn, for the South of France.
It so chanced a November session brought
Most of us back to town; I came to know
That for some weeks a change had worked in him;
So far from shunning her, he sought her now

With assiduity as strongly marked
As was his old avoidance; day by day
He sat with me, and I could always tell
By the disorder of his shattered nerves,
When he had passed to me from her; at last
One afternoon the outburst came; he crouched,
Shrunk, bowed, and shivering, in my smoking-room,
Before a fire by far too big for me.
The hand of Death was plainly beckoning him,
And I was racked with pity; he refused
To smoke, whereat I saw that he had reached
What Byron calls the last infirmity
Of evil; in default, I ordered up
Hot negus for him, which he gladly drank;
Then he broke forth, "Oh, Shirley, if she would
But tell me she once loved me, now at last
Before I go! She knows that I must die;
I've sworn, and I will keep my oath, to take
My farewell, once the comfortable words
Have passed her lips; I would depart in peace
Like Simeon of old, and pray for death
Before their echoes faded in my soul.
Will you not plead for me?"

I shall not pen

One word of unfelt self-apology;
In less than half an hour I found myself,
Oh ten times worse than fool, confronting Her;
My madman's mission done, and badly done
She rose, first flushed, then deadly pale; her look
Passed out of anger to a strained rebuke
Of passionate sadness, which was worse to me
Than any burst of rage had been, and that
Was what I feared; "You, of all men," said she,
In tremulous tones; "You know not what you ask;
Leave me at once;" and, when I would have spoken,
"No more, lest I say more; lest I say more!"
The phrase she thus repeated drove all speech
In from my lips, like cowed troops who fall back
Within their lines; through all my homeward way,
In battle with the noises of the street,
It rang in me, though, as I thought, with more
Of mystery than menace, till I slunk
Tamed, shamed, and fretting into Berkeley Square.
I found Him there, with a cigar half-smoked,
To my relief; he raised his eyes to mine
Without a word, and, looking back in turn,
I could but be as mute as he, so hard
To answer was the hunger in his gaze.

He rose and left me; two days thence he sailed,
And that brief silence was our last farewell.

In spite of all that I have here confessed
With Her my intimacy grew apace;
And with it grew, as meadow perfumes grow,
Unrecognized though palpable, the sense
That was to steep my being once for all.
Ours seemed but a sweet comradeship which filled
The void that theretofore had given me
My appetite for making friends of men;
I lived in isolation from the day
When He went out to die alone, until
That morning when Love came unheralded,
Flung off his mantle, and disclosed his plumes,
But, even while he blessed us, winged his way,
For sorrow shading his immortal eyes.

She seemed soon to have pardoned me my
prayer

For Him, who, having rallied for a while,
Lay sinking at Mentone; but for all
Her gracious *camaraderie*, her smiles
Of welcome, her hand-pressure in farewell,
And, once or twice, a wistfulness that passed
Over her eyes, like haze across the moon,

At partings of unwonted length, and spoke
Of something special in the preference
Wherewith she honoured me, I could not shake
Out of my memory those words that crushed
My last winter's appeal in His behalf;
"You, of all men! You know not what you ask;
No more, lest I say more; lest I say more."

"I would to heaven," thought I, as late one night,
I turned the corner into Berkeley Square,
"Some Delphic Priestess, some articulate Oak,
Or Sibyl, as explicit as that Maid
Who seated in her grove at Cumae, gave
His *Carte de Voyage* to the Trojan Chief,
Had got a Tripod somewhere in the wilds
Of Battersea or Kensington, and would,
For moderate consideration, give
The meaning of that cryptic utterance."
By this time I had reached my smoking-room,
And, turning over sundry letters, found
One from Mentone, and, of course, from Him.
Imagine my confusion and dismay
In lighting on this precious paragraph:
"See her once more, I do beseech you, Dick;
Say I am dying—this is true; a week

Or fortnight at the most is all they give,
I mean the Doctors—face her once again;
I guess too clearly what you had to bear
Before; but we are selfish, we who die.
And now she knows that I shall only wear
Her secret on my heart a few poor hours,
She may bestow it on me; any way,
I shall die blessing you for asking it.”

I read this and re-read it, and each time
Her phrase that I had pondered came and went,
Like some exasperating chime of bells
Heard by a criminal through his last night,
“No more, lest I say more, lest I say more.”
Ten restless hours brought me but little help;
Could I refuse him? Leave at any cost
A man I loved to die in his despair?
Though truly, I began to think, perhaps
To hope, that his last prayer was doubly vain,
In that she had no secret to confess.
But with the thought of yielding, came the dread
That she might mount the Tripod, might combine
Delphi, Dodona, Cumae, in one *rôle*,
And give me, to my great discomfiture,
Interpretation from the fountain head

Of her own Oracle. Well; in the end,
‘Better,’ thought I, ‘to dare a woman’s wrath
Than draw the pillow from a dying head.’
Oh, could I have divined that, while I vexed
My spirit with the words that tortured me,
It had become her wont to comfort hers
With some such thought as this, ‘How sweeter far
To love a man who knows not that he loves,
Than to look out on a too conscious passion
That wakes no echo in you.’ But till then
I never thought to win a woman’s love.
Yet, as it was, I think I had not gone,
If it had not been for his handwriting;
The haunting plea of its dumb characters
That straggled with the feebleness of death,
And seemed to question me, as a dog’s eyes
Might question his intending poisoner
Come with the deadly phial in his hand;
And so I went.

I faced her as I might,
Holding his open letter in my hand.
I saw her guess its purport, and the sight
Of her quick glance precipitated me
Into the gulf; She left me time to read

The passage I have quoted, then she rose,
And, reaching me with two or three quick strides,
While I stood paralyzed, she pounced upon
The maddening letter, tore it into shreds,
Clenched these, and flung them backwards towards
the fire.

Her flashing eyes still held me, as she clutched
My wrist, and thrust me from her, passed, and laid
Her hand upon the door, then, facing me,
Said, with a blast of scorn that nothing, save
The love I came to know, but knew not then,
Could ever, I don't say efface, but heal;
"Twice, twice, no more, my Lord; we meet no more;
I could have honoured you, take my contempt;
To think the Earl of Shirley could thus stoop
To show himself, and that to me, to me,
Valet and pander!" and was gone.

Next day

I heard that He had died, nay, had lain dead
While this went on; and so, I had incensed
The Lady whose esteem outshone to me
All meaner lights of birthright, wealth, and name,
To brand me with dishonour, and for nought.

After a while I grew to feel my fault

Less heinous than her vengeance was condign,
And looked that she should give some evidence
Of pardon, or perchance regret for words
That seemed to put her rage beyond the pale;
But she remained relentless, while for me,
If ever words had lashes, hers had scored
Too deep to leave an active penitence
Pulsating in me. So the Season passed,
The London crowd dispersed, and She and I
Went our respective ways, and made no sign.
I ordered out my yacht, avoided Cowes,
Where she might be, and striking northward, sailed
By Orkney and the Shetlands, round Cape Wrath,
And past the Isles to Oban; shot and fished
With sundry friends, finding myself at length
Half through September back at Branscombe Place,
Dejected, fretful, unappeased, alone.

I summoned Anne, at whom that Gentleman
Whom I misname 'The Mule,' was even then
Arching his honest crest, and wearily
Planned a campaign against my partridges.
Then rose the curtain on the Second Act
Of my life-tragedy, Her husband's death.
He had been shot in clambering up a bank

With gun full-cocked; his foot, it seems, had slipped;
Both barrels lodged their contents in his side,
And he fell dead without a cry.

The news

Reached me, as news of that sort often does;
One of my guests had seized upon 'The Times'
On our return from shooting—at that date
We got our Papers in the afternoon—
And read out the account 'mid just so much
Of general interest, as an incident
So sudden and so sad must needs arouse,
When he whom it lays low is widely known.
But what to me, as I stood listening there,
Were their conventional regrets? For me
This death was as the drawing of a veil
That theretofore had shrouded my own soul.
I seemed to see myself for the first time;
My double fault, her rage, her insults, flew
Like husks before a winnowing fan; the grain
Remained, her freedom, and her worth,
And, for I knew it now beyond disguise,
The surety of my overwhelming love.

But She—to say nought of my lack of grace
To find a way to any woman's heart—

How could she ever look upon the man
Who twice, how well I justified her now!
Had played the pander, as she said? But, more;
Apart from my misdoing, upon what,
Save on the quickest sands of false surmise,
Had I to build a hope? 'Twas very true
That since that fatal day I kept one phrase
Hoarded, and fondly severed from the rest,
'I could have honoured you, my Lord'; but then,
She flung that in my face, as who should say,
'The thoughts I wove of you are worthless rags,
I will no longer soil my soul with them';
Just as she crushed, and flung behind her back
The fragments of His letter. On such texts
How many a sermon did I preach myself,
Mixing and multiplying doubts and pains,
Seeking in vain some anodyne, where hope
Should be the mastering ingredient;
Alas, what knew I of the seated doom
Hidden behind the Alps of happiness
I was so timorously picturing,
Ready to rise and blot their flowered slopes
For ever from life's landscape.

With much pains

I had contrived to put in shape, and send
Some formal words of sorrow for her loss,
Shirking all else; two months or more then passed
In self-abandonment to all the winds
That buffet, baffle, and perplex the soul,
Love, doubt, hope, fear, remorse, despair, until
Once more I had my house at Branscombe full,
This time of pheasant slayers. A grand day
Did justice to the climate that I love;
Along the terrace, just before our start,
Women and men stood, or patrolled in groups,
Chattering miscellaneously; I sat
Over some correspondence in my room,
Able to catch fragments of gossip dropt
By passers by, and amongst others, these;
“How sad it is, so pretty and so young!”
“Why not add good?” “Oh, good, beyond all
doubt;”
“Ah, well, poor thing, it will not be for long.”
Then they walked out of hearing; in a while
They passed again; I caught, “What is it then,
Cancer?” “Well, so they say; some hateful thing,
Internal and malignant, any way.”
“But won’t they operate?” “They tell me, not;

It's too deep seated." I had heard no name,
Yet something plunged within me, like a rope
Plucked in a church tower for a passing-bell.
I rushed round to the terrace, and at once
Accosted the last speaker; "Whom," said I,
"Were you just talking of?" "Poor——" and, my
God,
The name was Hers. "Is there no hope, think you?"
"No, none; at least Sir Bradley Pope gave none,
"When they consulted him six weeks or so
Before her husband's death. Sad, isn't it,
That she should follow him within the year?
Not that she ever loved him, though, of course,
Her conduct, as they used to say of Knights,
Was wholly *sans reproche*." I braced myself
For some ten minutes more of commonplace,
Then joined the guns. How fortunate it was
That on such days I seldom fired a shot,
But walked outside, and so was much alone.

I dared not yet confess myself to Anne,
Though later she knew all; I own I feared
Her prudence; I was bent on a rash move,
From which I knew that her persuasion must

Amount to interdict; two months I kept
My mind on leash, in vacillation long
Between a letter that should tell Her all,
And a short note that simply should ask pardon,
And, as a sign thereof, an interview.
I knew my woman-Mentor far too well
'To challenge her consent to either plan;
Moreover, she was dreaming of her 'Mule,'
And, as I gathered, happily; I shunned
To cloud her outlook with my misery.
So, after many a tack 'gainst wind and stream,
I laid my helm down to the risky course,
And wrote Her thus;

“I do not write to ask
Your pardon; in the memory of those words
That sear me still, I deem that I have served
My sentence for my sin; just so may feel
A felon, issuing from his prison door,
Quits with Society; yet I would say
That His delusion worked its will in me
With such contagious force, such subtle guise
And symptomatic semblance of a truth,
As made me share it to the full, and dream
That you had loved him once as he loved you.

Then too, I knew that he was doomed to die,
And felt that an avowal of your love,
Long past it might be, still, a blessed fact
That made his wasted youth a sacred time,
Would smooth his death-bed. All is altered now ;
My spiritual vision has been purged :
I see and curse my blunder, and would fain,
Albeit my contrition comes too late,
Absolve your noble anger of the charge
I loathe my heart for harbouring so long.
Yet even now, so rash I am, I dare
To risk a ruin upon ruin, and draw
Fresh floods of indignation on my head,
Which should seek shelter from all further storms
In self-effacement and submission. Yet,
Rashness apart, so keen am I to show
Each facet of this apologia,
My task would seem to me but half performed
If I withheld from you the blessed source
That fills my well-spring of enlightenment.
I love you ; and I know beyond all chance
Of error, all misgiving, and all fear
Of change or lapse or any other pest
That can attack Love's surface or its core,

That I shall love you onward till I die;
As I have loved you since that very night
When He presented us, and I walked home
Astonished through the moonlight; breaking forth
In murmurs that made answer to my wonder;
A woman who would make one live for Heaven;
One too for whom a man would dare to die,
Or ride to ruin, if it might but be
That she should live and he ride forth alone?

“ Did you detect the secret which my Soul
Kept from me as though it were none of mine,
During those months wherethrough you honoured
me

With such a frequency, and made your house
More like a home to me than home itself,
Till my blind idiotcy closed its doors?
Ah no, that terrible rebuke remains
For answer; had you then divined my love,
Your pity would have quelled that on your lips,
And found some other way to mark my fault.
His death was as the dawning of the day
To my awakening, and your later loss
Brought the full light of morning; dare I add
That something I have heard glares down on me

With fierceness deadlier than a tropic noon?
But what to us are metaphors! sweet friend,
For so you are, let me be blunt and plain.

“ A nameless dread hath overwhelmed me, worse
E'en than your anger and contempt; those meant
Only my loss of you, but this enshrouds
Your destiny, alas, no less than mine;
They tell me you are ill; I dare not write
All that a careless and unwitting tongue
Revealed to me, but 'tis that you are ill,
Smitten, how can I frame the words! to death.
If their most hideous story were the truth,
I should but ask to tend and comfort you
Till God should take you from me; if 'twere false,
As of his mercy may it prove to be,
I could but lay and leave in trembling hope
My life's petition at your gracious feet,
As I do now.”

I kept this many days
Ere I dared send it, but at last it went
With date unchanged; though hating shiftiness,
I own I thought that the delay thus shown
Would point my hesitation, and disarm
Resentment of its readier stings. A week

Of ruffled days and feverish nights passed by,
Ere I tore open, with hands clumsier
Than usual through fear, an envelope
Dated from London, to find one scant line,
“I cannot answer yet, pray, bear with me.”
The words spelt respite, beyond doubt; I read,
Reread, kept lock and key in constant work,
And gave the missive every chance to make
Its own elucidation. At the last,
I turned to an infallible cigar,
Had a long confidential smoke, and then
Thought some fresh air might give me further light,
So fetched my dog, tramped for a good ten miles
Over our downs, and came back schooled and calm.
Yet stood I planted 'twixt two rival fears,
Scarce knowing which I dreaded most, her death,
Or her rejection of my love; 'twas strange,
But I seemed buoyed between the two; alone,
Either had upset me, counterpoised,
Their opposition stayed me, and I stood
Victim of neither, though the sport of both.

The comfort of their conflict was not long;
Her answer came; it lies before me now.
“You do not ask my pardon, and I feel

That you are in your right, and I no less
In mine to proffer none. I would not have
Flaw, smirch, or rivet of a fracture, mar
The crystal casket that should hold our love;
No pardon shall you crave nor I bestow.
I know you for the noblest among men;
Knew this throughout that long tumultuous time
Whilst honour bade me tell myself no more;
And 'twas perchance, I know not, care not now,
The fancy that an untouched heart alone
Could leave you free, and calm, and cold enough
To plead another's suit, that angered me
Most in your pleading; yet, how much less sore
It was to love a man who loved not me,
Or knew not that he loved me, than to watch
The hopeless pain of one I did not love.
Miscall it not immodesty that cries
So loudly 'How I love you!' I am free
To speak, as you are; shall I show myself
Less generous than you? No; speak I will;
It is your due; and mine, owed to myself,
Is to pay yours. My Richard, yes, my Richard;
To write your name is a new privilege;
Oh, what a girlish joy it brings to me

To frame the letters thus for the first time!

“ But I must stay my hand. The flush of joy
Dies down in me, and in its place returns
The stony pallor of that certain death
Which waits for me. For once, it was no lie
That Rumour told. I cannot let you come
Within the shadow of the brooding wings,
Nor cheat you with a phantom happiness
Which, while you thought to clasp it, would dissolve
And leave within your arms an empty shroud.

“ I should indeed gain this; I should have lived
For some few months in constant sight of you,
And sunk to sleep with the dear eyes and arms
Upon me and around me; but athwart
The consolation of that calm would sweep
The thought that I had deepened the great wound
Lost love must leave in such a heart as yours;
How should I vex my own, and, musing, weep
To see your passion and your tenderness
Grow with the lessening number of my days;
How should I pray death to come speedily,
And set you free from me, a mockery,
For such I should be; every day and hour
Would be a battle-field between the peace

Your presence should have wrought, and agony
Born of the knowledge of that bitter store
Your long watch would be garnering for your soul.

“ Since die I must, leave me to die alone ;
'The famine of your loss will be a boon ;
Its void will help to kill me soon, abridge
My term of pains, and school me for my end.
Live on, dear heart, and living, love again,
As will befit your manhood ; I shall pass
Happy in knowing you have chosen me
Out of all women for your earliest love ;
Content, if in your later happiness
You sometimes spare a tender memory,
(Which she, your wife, will be too good to grudge,)
To your first passion, though it may be dead
As she, who died apart to spare your pain.
It is my knowledge of your nobleness
That tells me I am right. Farewell, farewell.”

Invincible resolve to conquer hers
Beat back my misery ; I seized a pen
And answered her forthwith ; I would not risk
A second reading ; something I had missed
Might make me hesitate ; the lines I wrote
Are stamped still on my heart, and they were these :

“Never, farewell, so long as your sweet soul
T’arries to bless me with the sight of you!
When you are gone it will be time enough
To champ the bitter husks of memory;
Condemn me not to this before my time.
Is not your argument a blasphemy
Against the Lord of Life? Or brief or long,
If I live out your sojourn by your side,
Will not the Angels who are waiting you
Weep for us both? But should they see me not,
How will they scorn me, while those Evil ones,
Who hate the best there is in human-kind,
Laugh in our ears? Sweet one, this is no prayer
To grant or to reject; it is a claim
Made in Love’s name, that I may take my place
By your bed-side till I surrender you
To God alone, if this must be. I wait
My summons in a syllable; write ‘Come.’”

It came, that little word, and from it shrank
Back to my heart’s horizon the black cloud,
So soon to gather shape again, and mount
Implacable the zenith of my joy.
But for that moment, the one note in me
Rang triumph, while my horses at full speed

Devoured the spaces of the six long miles
From Branscombe Place to Branscombe town;
 thought I,
Irreverently, ignobly, if you will,
Recalling that last scene 'twixt her and me,
“How argument breeds courage in a man,
And, as a weapon, how inferior
It is to fury in a woman's fence.
How full of beauty and truth were her last pleas,
And yet they spelt surrender.”

 In the train,

So quieted was I, so far at ease,
I fell asleep half way, waking to hear
The call for 'tickets' as we entered London.
I left my servant at the terminus,
And drove straight to her house; she was alone;
And have I yet to pass a thousand years
Before I wake to meet with her again,
I still shall say that hour of love was worth
The waiting and my misery to come.

My second visit was to Anne, just then
The guest of our Aunt Wilmot for awhile;
What need to say how she flew off at once,
My Angel Sister, on impatient wings

Of sympathy and love, or how they two,
In silence unprofaned by needless words,
Sealed their sweet sisterhood with sacred tears.
For sundry weeks our patient sufferer stayed,
Obedient to our vain but natural prayer,
Seeking the aid that could not come, the hope
That none might utter; but the early Spring
Found Anne, with Her, her Mother, and myself,
Resigned at Branscombe, not to move again.
Nature in pity did her best; she gave
A Summer among summers, and no less
An Autumn rich with fruit and flowered calm;
And when at last a long hard Winter fell,
Our gentle Lady slept beneath the snows.

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