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ROBERT BROWNING'S
POETICAL WORKS

VOL. IV.



ROBERT BROWNING'S
POETICAL WORKS

VOL. IV.

THE POETICAL WORKS
of
ROBERT ^oBROWNING

VOL. IV.

*A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON
COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY
MEN AND WOMEN*

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1888

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A
BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON;
A TRAGEDY.

PERSONS.

MILDRED TRESHAM.

GUENDOLEN TRESHAM.

THOROLD, Earl Tresham.

AUSTIN TRESHAM.

HENRY, Earl Mertoun.

GERARD, *and other retainers of Lord Tresham.*

TIME, 17—.

A
BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON.

1843.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*The interior of a lodge in LORD TRESHAM'S park.
Many Retainers crowded at the window, supposed to command a view of the entrance to his mansion. GERARD, the warrener, his back to a table on which are flagons, etc.*

1st Retainer. Ay, do! push, friends, and then you'll
push down me!

—What for? Does any hear a runner's foot
Or a steed's trample or a coach-wheel's cry?
Is the Earl come or his least poursuivant?
But there's no breeding in a man of you
Save Gerard yonder: here's a half-place yet,
Old Gerard!

Gerard. Save your courtesies, my friend.
Here is my place.

2nd Retainer. Now, Gerard, out with it !
What makes you sullen, this of all the days
I' the year? To-day that young rich bountiful
Handsome Earl Mertoun, whom alone they match
With our Lord Tresham through the country-side,
Is coming here in utmost bravery
To ask our master's sister's hand ?

Gerard. What then ?

2nd Retainer. What then? Why, you, she speaks to,
if she meets
Your worship, smiles on as you hold apart
The boughs to let her through her forest walks,
You, always favourite for your no-deserts,
You 've heard, these three days, how Earl Mertoun sues
To lay his heart and house and broad lands too
At Lady Mildred's feet : and while we squeeze
Ourselves into a mousehole lest we miss
One congee of the least page in his train,
You sit o' one side—"there 's the Earl," say I—
"What then?" say you !

3rd Retainer. I 'll wager he has let
Both swans he tamed for Lady Mildred swim
Over the falls and gain the river !

Gerard. Ralph,
Is not to-morrow my inspecting-day
For you and for your hawks ?

4th Retainer.

Let Gerard be!

He's coarse-grained, like his carved black cross-bow
stock.

Ha, look now, while we squabble with him, look!

Well done, now—is not this beginning, now,

To purpose?

1st Retainer. Our retainers look as fine—

That's comfort. Lord, how Richard holds himself

With his white staff! Will not a knave behind

Prick him upright?

4th Retainer. He's only bowing, fool!

The Earl's man bent us lower by this much.

1st Retainer. That's comfort. Here's a very cavalcade!

3rd Retainer. I don't see wherefore Richard, and his
troop

Of silk and silver varlets there, should find

Their perfumed selves so indispensable

On high days, holidays! Would it so disgrace

Our family, if I, for instance, stood—

In my right hand a cast of Swedish hawks,

A leash of greyhounds in my left?—

Gerard.

—With Hugh

The logman for supporter, in his right

The bill-hook, in his left the brushwood-shears!

3rd Retainer. Out on you, crab! What next, what
next? The Earl!

1st Retainer. Oh Walter, groom, our horses, do they
match

The Earl's? Alas, that first pair of the six—
They paw the ground—Ah Walter! and that brute
Just on his haunches by the wheel!

6th Retainer. Ay—ay!

You, Philip, are a special hand, I hear,
At soups and sauces: what 's a horse to you?
D' ye mark that beast they 've slid into the midst
So cunningly?—then, Philip, mark this further;
No leg has he to stand on!

1st Retainer. No? That 's comfort.

2nd Retainer. Peace, Cook! The Earl descends.
Well, Gerard, see

The Earl at least! Come, there 's a proper man,
I hope! Why, Ralph, no falcon, Pole or Swede,
Has got a starrier eye.

3rd Retainer. His eyes are blue:
But leave my hawks alone!

4th Retainer. So young, and yet
So tall and shapely!

5th Retainer. Here 's Lord Tresham's self!
There now—there 's what a nobleman should be!
He 's older, graver, loftier, he 's more like
A House's head.

2nd Retainer. But you 'd not have a boy

—And what 's the Earl beside?—possess too soon
That stateliness?

1st Retainer. Our master takes his hand—
Richard and his white staff are on the move—
Back fall our people—(tsh!—there 's Timothy
Sure to get tangled in his ribbon-ties,
And Peter's cursed rosette 's a-coming off!)
—At last I see our lord's back and his friend's ;
And the whole beautiful bright company
Close round them—in they go ! [*Jumping down from the
window-bench, and making for the table and its
jugs.*] Good health, long life,
Great joy to our Lord Tresham and his House !

6th Retainer. My father drove his father first to court,
After his marriage-day—ay, did he !

2nd Retainer. God bless
Lord Tresham, Lady Mildred, and the Earl !
Here, Gerard, reach your beaker !

Gerard. Drink, my boys !
Don't mind me—all 's not right about me—drink !

2nd Retainer [aside]. He 's vexed, now, that he let
the show escape !

[*To GERARD.*] Remember that the Earl returns this way.

Gerard. That way ?

2nd Retainer. Just so.

Gerard. Then my way 's here. [*Goes.*

2nd Retainer.

Old Gerard

Will die soon—mind, I said it! He was used
To care about the pitifullest thing
That touched the House's honour, not an eye
But his could see wherein: and on a cause
Of scarce a quarter this importance, Gerard
Fairly had fretted flesh and bone away
In cares that this was right, nor that was wrong,
Such point decorous, and such square by rule—
He knew such niceties, no herald more:
And now—you see his humour: die he will!

2nd Retainer. God help him! Who's for the great
servants'-hall

To hear what's going on inside? They'd follow
Lord Tresham into the saloon.

3rd Retainer.

I!—

4th Retainer.

I!—

Leave Frank alone for catching, at the door,
Some hint of how the parley goes inside!
Prosperity to the great House once more!
Here's the last drop!

1st Retainer.

Have at you! Boys, hurrah!

SCENE II.—*A Saloon in the Mansion.*

Enter LORD TRESHAM, LORD MERTOUN, AUSTIN, *and*
GUENDOLEN.

Tresham. I welcome you, Lord Mertoun, yet once
more,

To this ancestral roof of mine. Your name
—Noble among the noblest in itself,
Yet taking in your person, fame avers,
New price and lustre,—(as that gem you wear,
Transmitted from a hundred knightly breasts,
Fresh chased and set and fixed by its last lord,
Seems to re-kindle at the core)—your name
Would win you welcome!—

Mertoun.

Thanks!

Tresham.

—But add to that,

The worthiness and grace and dignity
Of your proposal for uniting both
Our Houses even closer than respect
Unites them now—add these, and you must grant
One favour more, nor that the least,—to think
The welcome I should give;—'t is given! My lord,
My only brother, Austin: he's the king's.
Our cousin, Lady Guendolen—betrothed
To Austin: all are yours.

Mertoun. I thank you—less
For the expressed commendings which your seal,
And only that, authenticates—forbids
My putting from me . . . to my heart I take
Your praise . . . but praise less claims my gratitude,
Than the indulgent insight it implies
Of what must needs be uppermost with one
Who comes, like me, with the bare leave to ask,
In weighed and measured unimpassioned words,
A gift, which, if as calmly 't is denied,
He must withdraw, content upon his cheek,
Despair within his soul. That I dare ask
Firmly, near boldly, near with confidence
That gift, I have to thank you. Yes, Lord Tresham,
I love your sister—as you 'd have one love
That lady . . . oh more, more I love her! Wealth,
Rank, all the world thinks me, they 're yours, you know,
To hold or part with, at your choice—but grant
My true self, me without a rood of land,
A piece of gold, a name of yesterday,
Grant me that lady, and you . . . Death or life?

Guendolen [*apart to* AUSTIN]. Why, this is loving,
Austin!

Austin.

He 's so young!

Guendolen. Young? Old enough, I think, to half
surmise

He never had obtained an entrance here,
Were all this fear and trembling needed.

Austin.

Hush!

He reddens.

Guendolen. Mark him, Austin; that's true love!
Ours must begin again.

Tresham.

We'll sit, my lord.

Ever with best desert goes diffidence.

I may speak plainly nor be misconceived.

That I am wholly satisfied with you

On this occasion, when a falcon's eye

Were dull compared with mine to search out faults,

Is somewhat. Mildred's hand is hers to give

Or to refuse.

Mertoun.

But you, you grant my suit?

I have your word if hers?

Tresham.

My best of words

If hers encourage you. I trust it will.

Have you seen Lady Mildred, by the way?

Mertoun.

I . . . I . . . our two demesnes, remem-
ber, touch;

I have been used to wander carelessly

After my stricken game: the heron roused

Deep in my woods, has trailed its broken wing

Thro' thickets and glades a mile in yours,—or else

Some eyass ill-reclaimed has taken flight

And lured me after her from tree to tree,
 I marked not whither. I have come upon
 The lady's wondrous beauty unaware,
 And—and then . . . I have seen her.

Guendolen [*aside to AUSTIN*]. Note that mode
 Of faltering out that, when a lady passed,
 He, having eyes, did see her! You had said—
 “On such a day I scanned her, head to foot ;
 “Observed a red, where red should not have been,
 “Outside her elbow ; but was pleased enough
 “Upon the whole.” Let such irreverent talk
 Be lessoned for the future !

Tresham. What 's to say
 May be said briefly. She has never known
 A mother's care ; I stand for father too.
 Her beauty is not strange to you, it seems—
 You cannot know the good and tender heart,
 Its girl's trust and its woman's constancy,
 How pure yet passionate, how calm yet kind,
 How grave yet joyous, how reserved yet free
 As light where friends are—how imbued with lore
 The world most prizes, yet the simplest, yet
 The . . . one might know I talked of Mildred—thus
 We brothers talk !

Mertoun. I thank you.

Tresham. In a word,

Control 's not for this lady ; but her wish
To please me outstrips in its subtlety
My power of being pleased : herself creates
The want she means to satisfy. My heart
Prefers your suit to her as 't were its own.
Can I say more ?

Mertoun. No more—thanks, thanks—no more !

Tresham. This matter then discussed . . .

Mertoun. —We 'll waste no breath
On aught less precious. I 'm beneath the roof
Which holds her : while I thought of that, my speech
To you would wander—as it must not do,
Since as you favour me I stand or fall.
I pray you suffer that I take my leave !

Tresham. With less regret 't is suffered, that again
We meet, I hope, so shortly.

Mertoun. We? again?—
Ah yes, forgive me—when shall . . . you will crown
Your goodness by forthwith apprising me
When . . . if . . . the lady will appoint a day
For me to wait on you—and her.

Tresham. So soon
As I am made acquainted with her thoughts
On your proposal—howsoe'er they lean—
A messenger shall bring you the result.

Mertoun. You cannot bind me more to you, my lord.

Farewell till we renew . . . I trust, renew
A converse ne'er to disunite again.

Tresham. So may it prove!

Mertoun. You, lady, you, sir, take

My humble salutation!

Guendolen and Austin. Thanks!

Tresham. Within there!

[*Servants enter.* TRESHAM conducts MERTOUN to
the door. Meantime AUSTIN remarks,

Well,

Here I have an advantage of the Earl,
Confess now! I'd not think that all was safe
Because my lady's brother stood my friend!
Why, he makes sure of her—"do you say, yes—
"She'll not say, no,"—what comes it to beside?
I should have prayed the brother, "speak this speech,
"For Heaven's sake urge this on her—put in this—
"Forget not, as you'd save me, t' other thing,—
"Then set down what she says, and how she looks,
"And if she smiles, and" (in an under breath)
"Only let her accept me, and do you
"And all the world refuse me, if you dare!"

Guendolen. That way you'd take, friend Austin?

What a shame

I was your cousin, tamely from the first
Your bride, and all this fervour's run to waste!

Do you know you speak sensibly to-day?

The Earl's a fool.

Austin. Here's Thorold. Tell him so!

Tresham [*returning*]. Now, voices, voices! 'St! the lady's first!

How seems he?—seems he not . . . come, faith give fraud

The mercy-stroke whenever they engage!

Down with fraud, up with faith! How seems the Earl?

A name! a blazon! if you knew their worth,

As you will never! come—the Earl?

Guendolen. He's young.

Tresham. What's she? an infant save in heart and brain.

Young! Mildred is fourteen, remark! And you . . .

Austin, how old is she?

Guendolen. There's tact for you!

I meant that being young was good excuse

If one should tax him . . .

Tresham. Well?

Guendolen. —With lacking wit.

Tresham. He lacked wit? Where might he lack wit, so please you?

Guendolen. In standing straighter than the steward's rod
And making you the tiresomest harangue,
Instead of slipping over to my side

And softly whispering in my ear, "Sweet lady,
 "Your cousin there will do me detriment
 "He little dreams of: he's absorbed, I see,
 "In my old name and fame—be sure he'll leave
 "My Mildred, when his best account of me
 "Is ended, in full confidence I wear
 "My grandsire's periwig down either cheek.
 "I'm lost unless your gentleness vouchsafes" . . .

Tresham. . . . "To give a best of best accounts, your-
 self,

"Of me and my demerits." You are right!
 He should have said what now I say for him.
 You golden creature, will you help us all?
 Here's Austin means to vouch for much, but you
 —You are . . . what Austin only knows! Come up,
 All three of us: she's in the library
 No doubt, for the day's wearing fast. Precede!

Guendolen. Austin, how we must—!

Tresham. Must what? Must speak truth,
 Malignant tongue! Detect one fault in him!
 I challenge you!

Guendolen. Witchcraft's a fault in him,
 For you're bewitched.

Tresham. What's urgent we obtain
 Is, that she soon receive him—say, to-morrow—
 Next day at furthest.

I have not done such things, (all to deserve
A minute's quiet cousin's talk with you,
To be dismissed so coolly.

Mildred. Guendolen!

What have I done? what could suggest . . .

Guendolen. There, there!

Do I not comprehend you'd be alone
To throw those testimonies in a heap,
Thorold's enlargings, Austin's brevities,
With that poor silly heartless Guendolen's
Ill-timed misplaced attempted smartnesses—
And sift their sense out? now, I come to spare you
Nearly a whole night's labour. Ask and have!
Demand, be answered! Lack I ears and eyes?
Am I perplexed which side of the rock-table
The Conqueror dined on when he landed first,
Lord Mertoun's ancestor was bidden take—
The bow-hand or the arrow-hand's great meed?
Mildred, the Earl has soft blue eyes!

Mildred. My brother—

Did he . . . you said that he received him well?

Guendolen. If I said only "well" I said not much.

Oh, stay—which brother?

Mildred. Thorold! who—who else?

Guendolen. Thorold (a secret) is too proud by half,—
Nay, hear me out—with us he's even gentler

Than we are with our birds. Of this great House
The least retainer that e'er caught his glance
Would die for him, real dying—no mere talk :
And in the world, the court, if men would cite
The perfect spirit of honour, Thorold's name
Rises of its clear nature to their lips.
But he should take men's homage, trust in it,
And care no more about what drew it down.
He has desert, and that, acknowledgment ;
Is he content ?

Mildred. You wrong him, Guendolen.

Guendolen. He's proud, confess ; so proud with
brooding o'er
The light of his interminable line,
An ancestry with men all paladins,
And women all . . .

Mildred. Dear Guendolen, 't is late !
When yonder purple pane the climbing moon
Pierces, I know 't is midnight.

Guendolen. Well, that Thorold
Should rise up from such musings, and receive
One come audaciously to graft himself
Into this peerless stock, yet find no flaw,
No slightest spot in such an one . . .

Mildred. Who finds
A spot in Mertoun ?

Guendolen. Not your brother : therefore,
Not the whole world.

Mildred. I am weary, Guendolen.
Bear with me !

Guendolen. I am foolish.

Mildred. Oh no, kind !
But I would rest.

Guendolen. Good night and rest to you !
I said how gracefully his mantle lay
Beneath the rings of his light hair ?

Mildred. Brown hair.

Guendolen. Brown ? why, it *is* brown : how could you
know that ?

Mildred. How ? did not you—Oh, Austin 't was,
declared
His hair was light, not brown—my head !—and look,
The moon-beam purpling the dark chamber ! Sweet,
Good night !

Guendolen. Forgive me—sleep the soundlier for me !

[*Going, she turns suddenly.*

Mildred !

Perdition ! all's discovered ! Thorold finds
—That the Earl's greatest of all grandmothers
Was grander daughter still—to that fair dame
Whose garter slipped down at the famous dance ! [*Goes.*

Mildred. Is she—can she be really gone at last ?

*Then her voice's music . . . call it the well's bubbling, the
bird's warble!*

*[A figure wrapped in a mantle appears at the
window.*

*And this woman says, "My days were sunless and my
nights were moonless,*

*"Parched the pleasant April herbage, and the lark's heart's
outbreak tuneless,*

*"If you loved me not!" And I who—(ah, for words of
flame!) adore her,*

Who am mad to lay my spirit prostrate palpably before her—

*[He enters, approaches her seat, and bends over
her.*

*I may enter at her portal soon, as now her lattice takes me,
And by noontide as by midnight make her mine, as hers she
makes me!*

*[The Earl throws off his slouched hat and long
cloak.*

My very heart sings, so I sing, Beloved!

Mildred. Sit, Henry—do not take my hand!

Mertoun.

'T is mine.

The meeting that appalled us both so much

Is ended.

Mildred. What begins now?

Mertoun.

Happiness

Such as the world contains not.

Mildred.

That is it.

Our happiness would, as you say, exceed
The whole world's best of blisses : we—do we
Deserve that ? Utter to your soul, what mine
Long since, Beloved, has grown used to hear,
Like a death-knell, so much regarded once,
And so familiar now ; this will not be !

Mertoun. Oh, Mildred, have I met your brother's face
Compelled myself—if not to speak untruth,
Yet to disguise, to shun, to put aside
The truth, as—what had e'er prevailed on me
Save you, to venture ? Have I gained at last
Your brother, the one scarer of your dreams,
And waking thoughts' sole apprehension too ?
Does a new life, like a young sunrise, break
On the strange unrest of our night, confused
With rain and stormy flaw—and will you see
No dripping blossoms, no fire-tinted drops
On each live spray, no vapour steaming up,
And no expressless glory in the East ?
When I am by you, to be ever by you,
When I have won you and may worship you,
Oh, Mildred, can you say "this will not be" ?

Mildred. Sin has surprised us, so will punishment.

Mertoun. No—me alone, who sinned alone !

Mildred.

The night

You likened our past life to—was it storm
Throughout to you then, Henry?

Mertoun. Of your life
I spoke—what am I, what my life, to waste
A thought about when you are by me?—you
It was, I said my folly called the storm
And pulled the night upon. 'T was day with me—
Perpetual dawn with me.

Mildred. Come what, come will,
You have been happy: take my hand!

Mertoun [*after a pause*]. How good
Your brother is! I figured him a cold—
Shall I say, haughty man?

Mildred. They told me all.
I know all.

Mertoun. It will soon be over.

Mildred. Over?
Oh, what is over? what must I live through
And say, " 't is over"? Is our meeting over?
Have I received in presence of them all
The partner of my guilty love—with brow
Trying to seem a maiden's brow—with lips
Which make believe that when they strive to form
Replies to you and tremble as they strive,
It is the nearest ever they approached
A stranger's . . . Henry, yours that stranger's . . . lip—

With cheek that looks a virgin's, and that is . . .
Ah God, some prodigy of thine will stop
This planned piece of deliberate wickedness
In its birth even ! some fierce leprous spot
Will mar the brow's dissimulating ! I
Shall murmur no smooth speeches got by heart,
But, frenzied, pour forth all our woeful story,
The love, the shame, and the despair—with them
Round me aghast as round some cursed fount
That should spirt water, and spouts blood. I 'll not
. . . Henry, you do not wish that I should draw
This vengeance down ? I 'll not affect a grace
That 's gone from me—gone once, and gone for ever !

Mertoun. Mildred, my honour is your own. I 'll
share

Disgrace I cannot suffer by myself.
A word informs your brother I retract
This morning's offer ; time will yet bring forth
Some better way of saving both of us.

Mildred. I 'll meet their faces, Henry !

Mertoun. When ? to-morrow !

Get done with it !

Mildred. Oh, Henry, not to-morrow !
Next day ! I never shall prepare my words
And looks and gestures sooner.—How you must
Despise me !

Mertoun. Mildred, break it if you choose,
A heart the love of you uplifted—still
Uplifts, thro' this protracted agony,
To heaven ! but Mildred, answer me,—first pace
The chamber with me—once again—now, say
Calmly the part, the . . . what it is of me
You see contempt (for you did say contempt)
—Contempt for you in ! I would pluck it off
And cast it from me !—but no—no, you 'll not
Repeat that ?—will you, Mildred, repeat that ?

Mildred. Dear Henry !

Mertoun. I was scarce a boy—e'en now
What am I more ? And you were infantine
When first I met you ; why, your hair fell loose
On either side ! My fool's-cheek reddens now
Only in the recalling how it burned
That morn to see the shape of many a dream
—You know we boys are prodigal of charms
To her we dream of—I had heard of one,
Had dreamed of her, and I was close to her,
Might speak to her, might live and die her own,
Who knew ? I spoke. Oh, Mildred, feel you not
That now, while I remember every glance
Of yours, each word of yours, with power to test
And weigh them in the diamond scales of pride,
Resolved the treasure of a first and last

Whose pinion I have rashly hurt, my breast—
 Shall my heart's warmth not nurse thee into strength?
 Flower I have crushed, shall I not care for thee?
 Bloom o'er my crest, my fight-mark and device!
 Mildred, I love you and you love me.

Mildred. Go!

Be that your last word. I shall sleep to-night.

Mertoun. This is not our last meeting?

Mildred. One night more.

Mertoun. And then—think, then!

Mildred. Then, no sweet courtship-days,
 No dawning consciousness of love for us,
 No strange and palpitating births of sense
 From words and looks, no innocent fears and hopes,
 Reserves and confidences: morning's over!

Mertoun. How else should love's perfected noontide
 follow?

All the dawn promised shall the day perform.

Mildred. So may it be! but——

You are cautious, Love?

Are sure that unobserved you scaled the walls?

Mertoun. Oh, trust me! Then our final meeting's
 fixed

To-morrow night?

Mildred. Farewell! Stay, Henry . . . wherefore?
 His foot is on the yew-tree bough; the turf

Receives him : now the moonlight as he runs
Embraces him—but he must go—is gone.
Ah, once again he turns—thanks, thanks, my Love !
He 's gone. Oh, I 'll believe him every word !
I was so young, I loved him so, I had
No mother, God forgot me, and I fell.
There may be pardon yet : all 's doubt beyond.
Surely the bitterness of death is past.

ACT II.

SCENE.—*The Library.**Enter* LORD TRESHAM, *hastily.**Tresham.* This way! In, Gerard, quick![*As GERARD enters, TRESHAM secures the door.*

Now speak! or, wait—

I'll bid you speak directly.

[*Sits himself.*

Now repeat

Firmly and circumstantially the tale

You just now told me; it eludes me; either

I did not listen, or the half is gone

Away from me. How long have you lived here?

Here in my house, your father kept our woods

Before you?

Gerard. —As his father did, my lord.

I have been eating, sixty years almost,

Your bread.

Tresham. Yes, yes. You ever were of all

The servants in my father's house, I know,
The trusted one. You'll speak the truth.

Gerard. I'll speak
God's truth. Night after night . . .

Tresham. Since when?

Gerard. At least
A month—each midnight has some man access
To Lady Mildred's chamber.

Tresham. Tush, "access"—
No wide words like "access" to me!

Gerard. He runs
Along the woodside, crosses to the South,
Takes the left tree that ends the avenue . . .

Tresham. The last great yew-tree?

Gerard. You might stand upon
The main boughs like a platform. Then he . . .

Tresham. Quick!

Gerard. Climbs up, and, where they lessen at the top,
—I cannot see distinctly, but he throws,
I think—for this I do not vouch—a line
That reaches to the lady's casement—

Tresham. —Which
He enters not! Gerard, some wretched fool
Dares pry into my sister's privacy!
When such are young, it seems a precious thing
To have approached,—to merely have approached,

Got sight of, the abode of her they set
 Their frantic thoughts upon. He does not enter?
 Gerard?

Gerard. There is a lamp that 's full i' the midst,
 Under a red square in the painted glass
 Of Lady Mildred's . . .

Tresham. Leave that name out! Well?
 That lamp?

Gerard. —Is moved at midnight higher up
 To one pane—a small dark-blue pane; he waits
 For that among the boughs: at sight of that,
 I see him, plain as I see you, my lord,
 Open the lady's casement, enter there . . .

Tresham. —And stay?

Gerard. An hour, two hours.

Tresham. And this you saw
 Once?—twice?—quick!

Gerard. Twenty times.

Tresham. And what brings you
 Under the yew-trees?

Gerard. The first night I left
 My range so far, to track the stranger stag
 That broke the pale, I saw the man.

Tresham. Yet sent
 No cross-bow shaft through the marauder?

Gerard. But

He came, my lord, the first time he was seen,
In a great moonlight, light as any day,
From Lady Mildred's chamber.

Tresham [*after a pause*]. You have no cause
—Who could have cause to do my sister wrong?

Gerard. Oh, my lord, only once—let me this once
Speak what is on my mind! Since first I noted
All this, I've groaned as if a fiery net
Plucked me this way and that—fire if I turned
To her, fire if I turned to you, and fire
If down I flung myself and strove to die.
The lady could not have been seven years old
When I was trusted to conduct her safe
Through the deer-herd to stroke the snow-white fawn
I brought to eat bread from her tiny hand
Within a month. She ever had a smile
To greet me with—she . . . if it could undo
What's done, to lop each limb from off this trunk . . .
All that is foolish talk, not fit for you—
I mean, I could not speak and bring her hurt
For Heaven's compelling. But when I was fixed
To hold my peace, each morsel of your food
Eaten beneath your roof, my birth-place too,
Choked me. I wish I had grown mad in doubts
What it behoved me do. This morn it seemed
Either I must confess to you, or die:

Now it is done, I seem the vilest worm
That crawls, to have betrayed my lady.

Tresham. No—

No, Gerard!

Gerard. Let me go!

Tresham. A man, you say:

What man? Young? Not a vulgar hind? What
dress?

Gerard. A slouched hat and a large dark foreign
cloak

Wraps his whole form; even his face is hid;
But I should judge him young: no hind, be sure!

Tresham. Why?

Gerard. He is ever armed: his sword projects
Beneath the cloak.

Tresham. Gerard,—I will not say
No word, no breath of this!

Gerard. Thanks, thanks, my lord! [*Goes.*]

Tresham [*paces the room. After a pause*].

Oh, thought's absurd!—as with some monstrous fact
Which, when ill thoughts beset us, seems to give
Merciful God that made the sun and stars,
The waters and the green delights of earth,
The lie! I apprehend the monstrous fact—
Yet know the maker of all worlds is good,
And yield my reason up, inadequate

To reconcile what yet I do behold—
 Blasting my sense! There's cheerful day outside:
 This is my library, and this the chair
 My father used to sit in carelessly
 After his soldier-fashion, while I stood
 Between his knees to question him: and here
 Gerard our grey retainer,—as he says,
 Fed with our food, from sire to son, an age,—
 Has told a story—I am to believe!
 That Mildred . . . oh, no, no! both tales are true,
 Her pure cheek's story and the forester's!
 Would she, or could she, err—much less, confound
 All guilts of treachery, of craft, of . . . Heaven
 Keep me within its hand!—I will sit here
 Until thought settle and I see my course.
 Avert, oh God, only this woe from me!

*[As he sinks his head between his arms on the table,
 GUENDOLEN'S voice is heard at the door.*

Lord Tresham! *[She knocks.]* Is Lord Tresham there?

*[TRESHAM, hastily turning, pulls down the first
 book above him and opens it.*

Tresham. Come in! *[She enters.*

Ha, Guendolen!—good morning.

Guendolen. Nothing more?

Tresham. What should I say more?

Guendolen. Pleasant question! more?

This more. Did I besiege poor Mildred's brain
 Last night till close on morning with "the Earl,"
 "The Earl"—whose worth did I asseverate
 Till I am very fain to hope that . . . Thorold,
 What is all this? You are not well!

Tresham.

Who, I?

You laugh at me.

Guendolen. Has what I'm fain to hope,
 Arrived then? Does that huge tome show some blot
 In the Earl's 'scutcheon come no longer back
 Than Arthur's time?

Tresham. When left you Mildred's chamber?

Guendolen. Oh, late enough, I told you! The main
 thing

To ask is, how I left her chamber,—sure,
 Content yourself, she'll grant this paragon
 Of Earls no such ungracious . . .

Tresham.

Send her here!

Guendolen. Thorold?

Tresham. I mean—acquaint her, Guendolen,
 —But mildly!

Guendolen. Mildly?

Tresham.

Ah, you guessed aright!

I am not well: there is no hiding it.
 But tell her I would see her at her leisure—
 That is, at once! here in the library!

The passage in that old Italian book
We hunted for so long is found, say, found—
And if I let it slip again . . . you see,
That she must come—and instantly!

Guendolen. I'll die
Piecemeal, record that, if there have not gloomed
Some blot i' the 'scutcheon!

Tresham. Go! or, Guendolen,
Be you at call,—with Austin, if you choose,—
In the adjoining gallery! There, go! [*GUENDOLEN goes.*]
Another lesson to me! You might bid
A child disguise his heart's sore, and conduct
Some sly investigation point by point
With a smooth brow, as well as bid me catch
The inquisitorial cleverness some praise.
If you had told me yesterday, "There's one
"You needs must circumvent and practise with,
"Entrap by policies, if you would worm
"The truth out: and that one is—Mildred!" There,
There—reasoning is thrown away on it!
Prove she's unchaste . . . why, you may after prove
That she's a poisoner, traitress, what you will!
Where I can comprehend nought, nought's to say.
Or do, or think. Force on me but the first
Abomination,—then outpour all plagues,
And I shall ne'er make count of them.

Enter MILDRED.

Mildred. What book
Is it I wanted, Thorold? Guendolen
Thought you were pale; you are not pale. That book?
That's Latin surely.

Tresham. Mildred, here's a line,
(Don't lean on me: I'll English it for you)
"Love conquers all things." What love conquers
them?
What love should you esteem—best love?

Mildred. True love.

Tresham. I mean, and should have said, whose love
is best
Of all that love or that profess to love?

Mildred. The list's so long: there's father's, mother's,
husband's . . .

Tresham. Mildred, I do believe a brother's love
For a sole sister must exceed them all.
For see now, only see! there's no alloy
Of earth that creeps into the perfect'st gold
Of other loves—no gratitude to claim;
You never gave her life, not even aught
That keeps life—never tended her, instructed,
Enriched her—so, your love can claim no right
O'er her save pure love's claim: that's what I call

Freedom from earthliness. You 'll never hope
To be such friends, for instance, she and you,
As when you hunted cowslips in the woods
Or played together in the meadow hay.
Oh yes—with age, respect comes, and your worth
Is felt, there 's growing sympathy of tastes,
There 's ripened friendship, there 's confirmed esteem :
—Much head these make against the new-comer !
The startling apparition, the strange youth —
Whom one half-hour's conversing with, or, say,
Mere gazing at, shall change (beyond all change
This Ovid ever sang about) your soul
. . . Her soul, that is,—the sister's soul ! With her
'T was winter yesterday ; now, all is warmth,
The green leaf's springing and the turtle's voice,
“ Arise and come away ! ” Come whither ?—far
Enough from the esteem, respect, and all
The brother's somewhat insignificant
Array of rights ! All which he knows before,
Has calculated on so long ago !
I think such love, (apart from yours and mine,)
Contented with its little term of life,
Intending to retire betimes, aware
How soon the background must be place for it,
—I think, am sure, a brother's love exceeds
All the world's love in its unworldliness.

Mildred. What is this for?

Tresham.

This, Mildred, is it for!

Or, no, I cannot go to it so soon!

That's one of many points my haste left out—

Each day, each hour throws forth its silk-slight film

Between the being tied to you by birth,

And you, until those slender threads compose

A web that shrouds her daily life of hopes

And fears and fancies, all her life, from yours :

So close you live and yet so far apart!

And must I rend this web, tear up, break down

The sweet and palpitating mystery

That makes her sacred? You—for you I mean,

Shall I speak, shall I not speak?

Mildred.

Speak!

Tresham.

I will.

Is there a story men could—any man

Could tell of you, you would conceal from me?

I'll never think there's falsehood on that lip.

Say "There is no such story men could tell,"

And I'll believe you, though I disbelieve

The world—the world of better men than I,

And women such as I suppose you. Speak!

[*After a pause.*] Not speak? Explain then! Clear it

up then! Move

Some of the miserable weight away

That presses lower than the grave! Not speak?
Some of the dead weight, Mildred! Ah, if I
Could bring myself to plainly make their charge
Against you! Must I, Mildred? Silent still?
[*After a pause.*] Is there a gallant that has night by night
Admittance to your chamber?

[*After a pause.*] Then, his name!
Till now, I only had a thought for you:
But now,—his name!

Mildred. Thorold, do you devise
Fit expiation for my guilt, if fit
There be! 'T is nought to say that I'll endure
And bless you,—that my spirit yearns to purge
Her stains off in the fierce renewing fire:
But do not plunge me into other guilt!
Oh, guilt enough! I cannot tell his name.

Tresham. Then judge yourself! How should I act?
Pronounce!

Mildred. Oh, Thorold, you must never tempt me thus!
To die here in this chamber by that sword
Would seem like punishment: so should I glide,
Like an arch-cheat, into extremest bliss!
'T were easily arranged for me: but you—
What would become of you?

Tresham. And what will now
Become of me? I'll hide your shame and mine

From every eye ; the dead must heave their hearts
 Under the marble of our chapel-floor ;
 They cannot rise and blast you. You may wed
 Your paramour above our mother's tomb ;
 Our mother cannot move from 'neath your foot.
 We too will somehow wear this one day out :
 But with to-morrow hastens here—the Earl !
 The youth without suspicion face can come
 From Heaven, and heart from . . . whence proceed
 such hearts ?

I have despatched last night at your command
 A missive bidding him present himself
 To-morrow—here—thus much is said ; the rest
 Is understood as if 't were written down—
 “ His suit finds favour in your eyes.” Now dictate
 This morning's letter that shall countermand
 Last night's—do dictate that !

Mildred.

But, Thorold—if

I will receive him as I said ?

Tresham.

The Earl ?

Mildred. I will receive him.

Tresham [*starting up*].

Ho there ! Guendolen !

GUENDOLEN and AUSTIN enter.

And, Austin, you are welcome, too ! Look there !
 The woman there !

Austin and Guendolen. How? Mildred?

Tresham.

Mildred once!

Now the receiver night by night, when sleep
Blesses the inmates of her father's house,
—I say, the soft sly wanton that receives
Her guilt's accomplice 'neath this roof which holds
You, Guendolen, you, Austin, and has held
A thousand Treshams—never one like her!
No lighter of the signal-lamp her quick
Foul breath near quenches in hot eagerness
To mix with breath as foul! no loosener
O' the lattice, practised in the stealthy tread,
The low voice and the noiseless come-and-go!
Not one composer of the bacchant's mien
Into—what you thought Mildred's, in a word!
Know her!

Guendolen. Oh, Mildred, look to me, at least!
Thorold—she's dead, I'd say, but that she stands
Rigid as stone and whiter!

Tresham. You have heard . . .

Guendolen. Too much! You must proceed no further.

Mildred.

Yes—

Proceed! All's truth. Go from me!

Tresham.

All is truth,

She tells you! Well, you know, or ought to know,
All this I would forgive in her. I'd con

Each precept the harsh world enjoins, I'd take
Our ancestors' stern verdicts one by one,
I'd bind myself before them to exact
The prescribed vengeance—and one word of hers,
The sight of her, the bare least memory
Of Mildred, my one sister, my heart's pride
Above all prides, my all in all so long,
Would scatter every trace of my resolve.
What were it silently to waste away
And see her waste away from this day forth,
Two scathed things with leisure to repent,
And grow acquainted with the grave, and die
Tired out if not at peace, and be forgotten?
It were not so impossible to bear.
But this—that, fresh from last night's pledge renewed
Of love with the successful gallant there,
She calmly bids me help her to entice,
Inveigle an unconscious trusting youth
Who thinks her all that's chaste and good and pure,
—Invites me to betray him . . . who so fit
As honour's self to cover shame's arch-deed?
—That she'll receive Lord Mertoun—(her own phrase)—
This, who could bear? Why, you have heard of thieves,
Stabbers, the earth's disgrace, who yet have laughed,
“Talk not to me of torture—I'll betray
“No comrade I've pledged faith to!”—you have heard

Of wretched women—all but Mildreds—tied
By wild illicit ties to losels vile
You'd tempt them to forsake; and they'll reply
“Gold, friends, repute, I left for him, I find
“In him, why should I leave him then for gold,
“Repute or friends?”—and you have felt your heart
Respond to such poor outcasts of the world
As to so many friends; bad as you please,
You've felt they were God's men and women still,
So, not to be disowned by you. But she
That stands there, calmly gives her lover up
As means to wed the Earl that she may hide
Their intercourse the surelier: and, for this,
I curse her to her face before you all.
Shame hunt her from the earth! Then Heaven do right
To both! It hears me now—shall judge her then!

[*As MILDRED faints and falls, TRESHAM rushes out.*

Austin. Stay, Tresham, we'll accompany you!

Guendolen.

We?

What, and leave Mildred? We? Why, where's my place
But by her side, and where yours but by mine?
Mildred—one word! Only look at me, then!

Austin. No, Guendolen! I echo Thorold's voice.
She is unworthy to behold . . .

Guendolen.

Us two?

If you spoke on reflection, and if I

Approved your speech—if you (to put the thing
At lowest) you the soldier, bound to make
The king's cause yours and fight for it, and throw
Regard to others of its right or wrong,
—If with a death-white woman you can help,
Let alone sister, let alone a Mildred,
You left her—or if I, her cousin, friend
This morning, playfellow but yesterday,
Who said, or thought at least a thousand times,
“I'd serve you if I could,” should now face round
And say, “Ah, that 's to only signify
“I'd serve you while you're fit to serve yourself:
“So long as fifty eyes await the turn
“Of yours to forestall its yet half-formed wish,
“I'll proffer my assistance you'll not need—
“When every tongue is praising you, I'll join
“The praisers' chorus—when you're hemmed about
“With lives between you and detraction—lives
“To be laid down if a rude voice, rash eye,
“Rough hand should violate the sacred ring
“Their worship throws about you,—then indeed,
“Who'll stand up for you stout as I?” If so
We said, and so we did,—not Mildred there
Would be unworthy to behold us both,
But we should be unworthy, both of us,
To be beheld by—by—your meanest dog,

Which, if that sword were broken in your face
Before a crowd, that badge torn off your breast,
And you cast out with hooting and contempt,
—Would push his way thro' all the hooters, gain
Your side, go off with you and all your shame
To the next ditch you choose to die in! Austin,
Do you love me? Here 's Austin, Mildred,—here 's
Your brother says he does not believe half—
No, nor half that—of all he heard! He says,
Look up and take his hand!

Austin. Look up and take
My hand, dear Mildred!

Mildred. I—I was so young!
Beside, I loved him, Thorold—and I had
No mother; God forgot me: so, I fell.

Guendolen. Mildred!

Mildred. Require no further! Did I
dream

That I could palliate what is done? All 's true.
Now, punish me! A woman takes my hand?
Let go my hand! You do not know, I see.
I thought that Thorold told you.

Guendolen. What is this?
Where start you to?

Mildred. Oh, Austin, loosen me!
You heard the whole of it—your eyes were worse,

In their surprise, than Thorold's! Oh, unless
 You stay to execute his sentence, loose
 My hand! Has Thorold gone, and are you here?

Guendolen. Here, Mildred, we two friends of yours
 will wait

Your bidding; be you silent, sleep or muse!
 Only, when you shall want your bidding done,
 How can we do it if we are not by?
 Here's Austin waiting patiently your will!
 One spirit to command, and one to love
 And to believe in it and do its best,
 Poor as that is, to help it—why, the world
 Has been won many a time, its length and breadth,
 By just such a beginning!

Mildred. I believe
 If once I threw my arms about your neck
 And sunk my head upon your breast, that I
 Should weep again.

Guendolen. Let go her hand now, Austin!
 Wait for me. Pace the gallery and think
 On the world's seemings and realities,
 Until I call you. [AUSTIN goes.

Mildred. No—I cannot weep.
 No more tears from this brain—no sleep—no
 tears!
 O Guendolen, I love you!

Guendolen. Yes: and "love"
Is a short word that says so very much!
It says that you confide in me.

Mildred. Confide!

Guendolen. Your lover's name, then! I've so much
to learn,
Ere I can work in your behalf!

Mildred. My friend,
You know I cannot tell his name.

Guendolen. At least
He is your lover? and you love him too?

Mildred. Ah, do you ask me that?—but I am fallen
So low!

Guendolen. You love him still, then?

Mildred. My sole prop
Against the guilt that crushes me! I say,
Each night ere I lie down, "I was so young—
"I had no mother, and I loved him so!"
And then God seems indulgent, and I dare
Trust him my soul in sleep.

Guendolen. How could you let us
E'en talk to you about Lord Mertoun then?

Mildred. There is a cloud around me.

Guendolen. But you said
You would receive his suit in spite of this?

Mildred. I say there is a cloud . . .

Guendolen. No cloud to me!
Lord Mertoun and your lover are the same!

Mildred. What maddest fancy . . .

Guendolen [*calling aloud*]. Austin! (spare your pains—
When I have got a truth, that truth I keep)—

Mildred. By all you love, sweet Guendolen, forbear!
Have I confided in you . . .

Guendolen. Just for this!
Austin!—Oh, not to guess it at the first!
But I did guess it—that is, I divined,
Felt by an instinct how it was : why else
Should I pronounce you free from all that heap
Of sins which had been irredeemable?
I felt they were not yours—what other way
Than this, not yours? The secret's wholly mine!

Mildred. If you would see me die before his face . . .

Guendolen. I'd hold my peace! And if the Earl
returns
To-night?

Mildred. Ah Heaven, he's lost!

Guendolen. I thought so. Austin!

Enter AUSTIN.

Oh, where have you been hiding?

Austin. 'Thorold's gone,
I know not how, across the meadow-land.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*The end of the Yew-tree Avenue under MILDRED'S window. A light seen through a central red pane.*

Enter TRESHAM through the trees.

Again here! But I cannot lose myself.
The heath—the orchard—I have traversed glades
And dells and bosky paths which used to lead
Into green wild-wood depths, bewildering
My boy's adventurous step. And now they tend
Hither or soon or late; the blackest shade
Breaks up, the thronged trunks of the trees ope wide,
And the dim turret I have fled from, fronts
Again my step; the very river put
Its arm about me and conducted me
To this detested spot. Why then, I'll shun
Their will no longer: do your will with me!
Oh, bitter! To have reared a towering scheme
Of happiness, and to behold it razed,
Were nothing: all men hope, and see their hopes
Frustrate, and grieve awhile, and hope anew.

But I . . . to hope that from a line like ours
No horrid prodigy like this would spring,
Were just as though I hoped that from these old
Confederates against the sovereign day,
Children of older and yet older sires,
Whose living coral berries dropped, as now
On me, on many a baron's surcoat once,
On many a beauty's whimple--would proceed
No poison-tree, to thrust, from hell its root,
Hither and thither its strange snaky arms.
Why came I here? What must I do? [*A bell strikes.*]

A bell?

Midnight! and 't is at midnight . . . Ah, I catch
—Woods, river, plains, I catch your meaning now,
And I obey you! Hist! This tree will serve.

[*He retires behind one of the trees. After a pause,
enter MERTOUN cloaked as before.*]

Mertoun. Not time! Beat out thy last voluptuous
beat

Of hope and fear, my heart! I thought the clock
I' the chapel struck as I was pushing through
The ferns. And so I shall no more see rise
My love-star! Oh, no matter for the past!
So much the more delicious task to watch
Mildred revive: to pluck out, thorn by thorn,
All traces of the rough forbidden path

My rash love lured her to! Each day must see
 Some fear of hers effaced, some hope renewed:
 Then there will be surprises, unforeseen
 Delights in store. I'll not regret the past.

[The light is placed above in the purple pane.]

And see, my signal rises, Mildred's star!

I never saw it lovelier than now

It rises for the last time. If it sets,

'T is that the re-assuring sun may dawn.

[As he prepares to ascend the last tree of the avenue,

TRESHAM arrests his arm.]

Unhand me—peasant, by your grasp! Here 's gold.

'T was a mad freak of mine. I said I'd pluck

A branch from the white-blossomed shrub beneath

The casement there. Take this, and hold your peace.

Tresham. Into the moonlight yonder, come with me!

Out of the shadow!

Mertoun. I am armed, fool!

Tresham. Yes,

Or no? You'll come into the light, or no?

My hand is on your throat—refuse!—

Mertoun. That voice!

Where have I heard . . . no—that was mild and slow.

I'll come with you. *[They advance.]*

Tresham. You're armed: that's well. Declare
 Your name: who are you?

We should join hands in frantic sympathy
 If you once taught me the unteachable,
 Explained how you can live so, and so lie.
 With God's help I retain, despite my sense,
 The old belief—a life like yours is still
 Impossible. Now draw!

Mertoun.

Not for my sake,

Do I entreat a hearing—for your sake,
 And most, for her sake!

Tresham.

Ha ha, what should I

Know of your ways? A miscreant like yourself,
 How must one rouse his ire? A blow?—that's pride
 No doubt, to him! One spurns him, does one not?
 Or sets the foot upon his mouth, or spits
 Into his face! Come! Which, or all of these?

Mertoun. 'Twixt him and me and Mildred, Heaven be
 judge!

Can I avoid this? Have your will, my lord!

[He draws and, after a few passes, falls.]

Tresham. You are not hurt?

Mertoun.

You'll hear me now!

Tresham.

But rise!

Mertoun. Ah, Tresham, say I not "you'll hear me
 now!"

And what procures a man the right to speak
 In his defence before his fellow man,

But—I suppose—the thought that presently
He may have leave to speak before his God
His whole defence ?

Tresham. Not hurt? It cannot be !
You made no effort to resist me. Where
Did my sword reach you? Why not have returned
My thrusts? Hurt where ?

Mertoun. My lord—

Tresham. How young he is !

Mertoun. Lord Tresham, I am very young, and yet
I have entangled other lives with mine.

Do let me speak, and do believe my speech !
That when I die before you presently,—

Tresham. Can you stay here till I return with help ?

Mertoun. Oh, stay by me ! When I was less than
boy

I did you grievous wrong and knew it not—
Upon my honour, knew it not ! Once known,
I could not find what seemed a better way
To right you than I took : my life—you feel
How less than nothing were the giving you
The life you 've taken ! But I thought my way
The better—only for your sake and hers :
And as you have decided otherwise,
Would I had an infinity of lives
To offer you ! Now say—instruct me—think !

Can you, from the brief minutes I have left,
Eke out my reparation? Oh think—think!
For I must wring a partial—dare I say,
Forgiveness from you, ere I die?

Tresham. I do

Forgive you.

Mertoun. Wait and ponder that great word!
Because, if you forgive me, I shall hope
To speak to you of—Mildred!

Tresham. Mertoun, haste
And anger have undone us. 'T is not you
Should tell me for a novelty you 're young,
Thoughtless, unable to recall the past.
Be but your pardon ample as my own!

Mertoun. Ah, Tresham, that a sword-stroke and
a drop

Of blood or two, should bring all this about!
Why, 't was my very fear of you, my love
Of you—(what passion like a boy's for one
Like you?)—that ruined me! I dreamed of you—
You, all accomplished, courted everywhere,
The scholar and the gentleman. I burned
To knit myself to you: but I was young,
And your surpassing reputation kept me
So far aloof! Oh, wherefore all that love?
With less of love, my glorious yesterday

What those three small words mean! Say, loving her
 Lowers me down the bloody slope to death .
 With memories . . . I speak to her, not you,
 Who had no pity, will have no remorse,
 Perchance intend her . . . Die along with me,
 Dear Mildred! 't is so easy, and you 'll 'scape
 So much unkindness! Can I lie at rest,
 With rude speech spoken to you, ruder deeds
 Done to you?—heartless men shall have my heart,
 And I tied down with grave-clothes and the worm,
 Aware, perhaps, of every blow—oh God!—
 Upon those lips—yet of no power to tear
 The felon stripe by stripe! Die, Mildred! Leave
 Their honourable world to them! For God
 We 're good enough, though the world casts us out.

[*A whistle is heard.*]

Tresham. Ho, Gerard!

Enter GERARD, AUSTIN and GUENDOLEN, with lights.

No one speak! You see what 's done.
 I cannot bear another voice.

Mertoun. There 's light—
 Light all about me, and I move to it.
 Tresham, did I not tell you—did you not
 Just promise to deliver words of mine
 To Mildred?

Tresham. I will bear those words to her.

Mertoun. Now?

Tresham. Now. Lift you the body, and leave me
The head.

[*As they have half raised MERTOUN, he turns suddenly.*]

Mertoun. I knew they turned me: turn me not from
her!

There! stay you! there! [*Dies.*]

Guendolen [*after a pause*]. Austin, remain you here
With Thorold until Gerard comes with help:
Then lead him to his chamber. I must go
To Mildred.

Tresham. Guendolen, I hear each word
You utter. Did you hear him bid me give
His message? Did you hear my promise? I,
And only I, see Mildred.

Guendolen. She will die.

Tresham. Oh no, she will not die! I dare not hope
She'll die. What ground have you to think she'll die?
Why, Austin's with you!

Austin. Had we but arrived
Before you fought!

Tresham. There was no fight at all.
He let me slaughter him—the boy! I'll trust
The body there to you and Gerard—thus!
Now bear him on before me.

Austin. Whither bear him?

Tresham. Oh, to my chamber! When we meet there
next,

We shall be friends. [*They bear out the body of MERTOUN.*
Will she die, Guendolen?

Guendolen. Where are you taking me?

Tresham. He fell just here.

Now answer me. Shall you in your whole life
--You who have nought to do with Mertoun's fate,
Now you have seen his breast upon the turf,
Shall you e'er walk this way if you can help?
When you and Austin wander arm-in-arm
Through our ancestral grounds, will not a shade
Be ever on the meadow and the waste—
Another kind of shade than when the night
Shuts the woodside with all its whispers up?
But will you ever so forget his breast
As carelessly to cross this bloody turf
Under the black yew avenue? That 's well!
You turn your head: and I then?—

Guendolen. What is done

Is done. My care is for the living. Thorold,
Bear up against this burden: more remains
To set the neck to!

Tresham. Dear and ancient trees
My fathers planted, and I loved so well!

What have I done that, like some fabled crime
Of yore, lets loose a Fury leading thus
Her miserable dance amidst you all?
Oh, never more for me shall winds intone
With all your tops a vast antiphony,
Demanding and responding in God's praise!
Hers ye are now, not mine! Farewell—farewell!

SCENE II.—MILDRED'S *chamber*. MILDRED *alone*.

He comes not! I have heard of those who seemed
Resourceless in prosperity,—you thought
Sorrow might slay them when she listed; yet
Did they so gather up their diffused strength
At her first menace, that they bade her strike,
And stood and laughed her subtlest skill to scorn.
Oh, 't is not so with me! The first woe fell,
And the rest fall upon it, not on me:
Else should I bear that Henry comes not?—fails
Just this first night out of so many nights?
Loving is done with. Were he sitting now,
As so few hours since, on that seat, we'd love
No more—contrive no thousand happy ways

To hide love from the loveless, any more.
 I think I might have urged some little point
 In my defence, to Thorold ; he was breathless
 For the least hint of a defence : but no,
 The first shame over, all that would might fall.
 No Henry ! Yet I merely sit and think
 The morn's deed o'er and o'er. I must have crept
 Out of myself. A Mildred that has lost
 Her lover—oh, I dare not look upon
 Such woe ! I crouch away from it ! 'T is she,
 Mildred, will break her heart, not I ! The world
 Forsakes me : only Henry 's left me—left ?
 When I have lost him, for he does not come,
 And I sit stupidly . . . Oh Heaven, break up
 This worse than anguish, this mad apathy,
 By any means or any messenger !

Tresham [*without*]. Mildred !

Mildred.

Come in ! Heaven hears me !

[*Enter TRESHAM.*] You ' alone ?

Oh, no more cursing !

Tresham.

Mildred, I must sit.

There—you sit !

Mildred.

Say it, Thorold—do not look

The curse ! deliver all you come to say !

What must become of me ? Oh, speak that thought

Which makes your brow and cheeks so pale !

[*Dashing his mantle aside, and pointing to his scabbard, which is empty.*

Ah, this speaks for you

You've murdered Henry Mertoun! Now proceed!

What is it I must pardon? This and all?

Well, I do pardon you—I think I do.

Thorold, how very wretched you must be!

Tresham. He bade me tell you . . .

Mildred. What I do forbid

Your utterance of! So much that you may tell

And will not—how you murdered him . . . but, no!

You'll tell me that he loved me, never more

Than bleeding out his life there: must I say

“Indeed,” to that? Enough! I pardon you.

Tresham. You cannot, Mildred! for the harsh words,
yes:

Of this last deed Another's judge: whose doom

I wait in doubt, despondency and fear.

Mildred. Oh, true! There's nought for me to
pardon! True!

You loose my soul of all its cares at once.

Death makes me sure of him for ever! You

Tell me his last words? He shall tell me them,

And take my answer—not in words, but reading

Himself the heart I had to read him late,

Which death . . .

Tresham. Death? You are dying too? Well said
Of Guendolen! I dared not hope you 'd die :
But she was sure of it.

Mildred. Tell Guendolen
I loved her, and tell Austin . . .

Tresham. Him you loved :
And me?

Mildred. Ah, Thorold! Was 't not rashly done
To quench that blood, on fire with youth and hope
And love of me—whom you loved too, and yet
Suffered to sit here waiting his approach
While you were slaying him? Oh, doubtlessly
You let him speak his poor confused boy's-speech
—Do his poor utmost to disarm your wrath
And respite me!—you let him try to give
The story of our love and ignorance,
And the brief madness and the long despair—
You let him plead all this, because your code
Of honour bids you hear before you strike :
But at the end, as he looked up for life
Into your eyes—you struck him down!

Tresham. No! No!
Had I but heard him—had I let him speak
Half the truth—less—had I looked long on him
I had desisted! Why, as he lay there,
The moon on his flushed cheek, I gathered all

The story ere he told it : I saw through
 The troubled surface of his crime and yours
 A depth of purity immovable,
 Had I but glanced, where all seemed turbidest
 Had gleamed some inlet to the calm beneath ;
 I would not glance : my punishment 's at hand.
 There, Mildred, is the truth ! and you—say on—
 You curse me ?

Mildred. As I dare approach that Heaven
 Which has not bade a living thing despair,
 Which needs no code to keep its grace from stain,
 But bids the vilest worm that turns on it
 Desist and be forgiven,—I—forgive not,
 But bless you, Thorold, from my soul of souls !

[*Falls on his neck.*]

There ! Do not think too much upon the past !
 The cloud that 's broke was all the same a cloud
 While it stood up between my friend and you ;
 You hurt him 'neath its shadow : but is that
 So past retrieve ? I have his heart, you know ;
 I may dispose of it : I give it you !
 It loves you as mine loves ! Confirm me, Henry !

[*Dies.*]

Tresham. I wish thee joy, Beloved ! I am glad
 In thy full gladness !

Guendolen [*without*]. Mildred ! Tresham !

[*Entering with AUSTIN.*] Thorold,
I could desist no longer. Ah, she swoons!
That's well.

Tresham. Oh, better far than that!

Guendolen. She's dead!

Let me unlock her arms!

Tresham. She threw them thus
About my neck, and blessed me, and then died:
You'll let them stay now, Guendolen!

Austin. Leave her
And look to him! What ails you, Thorold?

Guendolen. White
As she, and whiter! Austin! quick—this side!

Austin. A froth is oozing through his clenched teeth;
Both lips, where they're not bitten through, are black:
Speak, dearest Thorold!

Tresham. Something does weigh down
My neck beside her weight: thanks: I should fall
But for you, Austin, I believe!—there, there,
'T will pass away soon!—ah,—I had forgotten:
I am dying.

Guendolen. Thorold—Thorold—why was this?

Tresham. I said, just as I drank the poison off,
The earth would be no longer earth to me,
The life out of all life was gone from me.
There are blind ways provided, the foredone

Heart-weary player in this pageant-world
Drops out by, letting the main masque defile
By the conspicuous portal : I am through—
Just through !

Guendolen. Don't leave him, Austin ! Death is close.

Tresham. Already Mildred's face is peacefuller.
I see you, Austin—feel you : here 's my hand,
Put yours in it—you, Guendolen, yours too !
You 're lord and lady now—you 're Treshams ; name
And fame are yours : you hold our 'scutcheon up.
Austin, no blot on it ! You see how blood
Must wash one blot away : the first blot came
And the first blood came. To the vain world's eye
All 's gules again : no care to the vain world,
From whence the red was drawn !

Austin. No blot shall come !

Tresham. I said that : yet it did come. Should it
come,
Vengeance is God's, not man's. Remember me ! [*Dies.*
Guendolen [*letting fall the pulseless arm*]. Ah, Thorold,
we can but—remember you !

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY;

A PLAY

Ivy and violet, what do ye here
With blossom and shoot in the warm spring-weather,
Hiding the arms of Monchenci and Vere?—HANMER.



NO ONE LOVES AND HONOURS BARRY CORNWALL MORE THAN
DOES ROBERT BROWNING ;
WHO, HAVING NOTHING BETTER THAN THIS PLAY TO
GIVE HIM IN PROOF OF IT,
MUST SAY SO.

LONDON : 1844.

PERSONS.

COLOMBE OF RAVESTEIN, Duchess of Juliers and Cleves.

SABYNE, ADOLF, *her attendants.*

GUIBERT, GAUCELME, MAUFROY, CLUGNET, *courtiers.*

VALENCE, *advocate of Cleves.*

PRINCE BERTHOLD, *claimant of the Duchy.*

MELCHIOR, *his confidant.*

PLACE.—*The Palace at Juliers.*

TIME, 16—.

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY.

1844.

ACT I.

MORNING.

SCENE.—*A corridor leading to the Audience-chamber.*

GAUCELME, CLUGNET, MAUFROY *and other Courtiers, round*
GUIBERT, *who is silently reading a paper: as he drops it*
at the end—

Guibert. That this should be her birthday; and the
day

We all invested her, twelve months ago,
As the late Duke's true heiress and our liege;
And that this also must become the day . . .
Oh, miserable lady!

1st Courtier. Ay, indeed?

2nd Courtier. Well, Guibert?

3rd Courtier. But your news, my friend, your news!
The sooner, friend, one learns Prince Berthold's pleasure,

The better for us all : how writes the Prince ?
Give me ! I 'll read it for the common good.

Guibert. In time, sir,—but till time comes, pardon me !
Our old Duke just disclosed his child's retreat,
Declared her true succession to his rule,
And died : this birthday was the day, last year,
We convoyed her from Castle Ravestein—
That sleeps out trustfully its extreme age
On the Meuse' quiet bank, where she lived queen
Over the water-buds,—to Juliers' court
With joy and bustle. Here again we stand ;
Sir Gaucelme's buckle's constant to his cap :
To-day's much such another sunny day !

Gaucelme. Come, Guibert, this outgrows a jest, I
think !

You're hardly such a novice as to need
The lesson, you pretend.

Guibert. What lesson, sir ?
That everybody, if he'd thrive at court,
Should, first and last of all, look to himself ?
Why, no : and therefore with your good example,
(—Ho, Master Adolf!)—to myself I'll look.

Enter ADOLF.

Guibert. The Prince's letter ; why, of all men else,
Comes it to me ?

Adolf. By virtue of your place,
Sir Guibert ! 'T was the Prince's express charge,
His envoy told us, that the missive there
Should only reach our lady by the hand
Of whosoever held your place.

Guibert. Enough ! [*ADOLF retires*]
Then, gentles, who 'll accept a certain poor
Indifferently honourable place,
My friends, I make no doubt, have gnashed their teeth
At leisure minutes these half-dozen years,
To find me never in the mood to quit ?
Who asks may have it, with my blessing, and—
This to present our lady. Who 'll accept ?
You,—you,—you ? There it lies, and may, for me !

Maufroy [*a youth, picking up the paper, reads aloud*].
“ Prince Berthold, proved by titles following
“ Undoubted Lord of Juliers, comes this day
“ To claim his own, with licence from the Pope,
“ The Emperor, the Kings of Spain and France ” . . .

Gaucelme. Sufficient “ titles following,” I judge !
Don't read another ! Well,—“ to claim his own ? ”

Maufroy. “—And take possession of the Duchy held
“ Since twelve months, to the true heir's prejudice,
“ By ” . . . Colombe, Juliers' mistress, so she thinks,
And Ravestein's mere lady, as we find.
Who wants the place and paper ? Guibert's right.

I hope to climb a little in the world,—
 I'd push my fortunes,—but, no more than he,
 Could tell her on this happy day of days,
 That, save the nosegay in her hand, perhaps,
 There 's nothing left to call her own. Sir Clugnet,
 You famish for promotion ; what say you ?

Clugnet [*an old man*]. To give this letter were a sort,

I take it,

Of service : services ask recompense :
 What kind of corner may be Ravestein ?

Guibert. The castle ? Oh, you 'd share her fortunes ?

Good !

Three walls stand upright, full as good as four,
 With no such bad remainder of a roof.

Clugnet. Oh,—but the town ?

Guibert. Five houses, fifteen huts ;

A church whereto was once a spire, 't is judged ;
 And half a dyke, except in time of thaw.

Clugnet. Still, there 's some revenue ?

Guibert. Else Heaven forfend !

You hang a beacon out, should fogs increase ;
 So, when the Autumn floats of pine-wood steer
 Safe 'mid the white confusion, thanks to you,
 Their grateful raftsmen fling a guilder in ;
 —That 's if he mean to pass your way next time.

Clugnet. If not ?

Guibert. Hang guilders, then ! He blesses you.

Clugnet. What man do you suppose me ? Keep your paper !

And, let me say, it shows no handsome spirit
To dally with misfortune : keep your place !

Gaucelme. Some one must tell her.

Guibert. Some one may : you may !

Gaucelme. Sir Guibert, 't is no trifle turns me sick
Of court-hypocrisy at years like mine,
But this goes near it. Where 's there news at all ?
Who 'll have the face, for instance, to affirm
He never heard, e'en while we crowned the girl,
That Juliers' tenure was by Salic law ;
That one, confessed her father's cousin's child,
And, she away, indisputable heir,
Against our choice protesting and the Duke's,
Claimed Juliers ?—nor, as he preferred his claim,
That first this, then another potentate,
Inclined to its allowance ?—I or you,
Or any one except the lady's self ?
Oh, it had been the direst cruelty
To break the business to her ! Things might change :
At all events, we 'd see next masque at end,
Next mummery over first : and so the edge
Was taken off sharp tidings as they came,
Till here 's the Prince upon us, and there 's she

—Wreathing her hair, a song between her lips,
With just the faintest notion possible
That some such claimant earns a livelihood
About the world, by feigning grievances—
Few pay the story of, but grudge its price,
And fewer listen to, a second time.
Your method proves a failure ; now try mine !
And, since this must be carried . . .

Guibert [snatching the paper from him]. By your
leave !

Your zeal transports you ! 'T will not serve the Prince
So much as you expect, this course you 'd take.
If she leaves quietly her palace,—well ;
But if she died upon its threshold,—no :
He 'd have the trouble of removing her.
Come, gentles, we 're all—what the devil knows !
You, Gaucelme, won't lose character, beside :
You broke your father's heart superiorly
To gather his succession—never blush !
You 're from my province, and, be comforted,
They tell of it with wonder to this day.
You can afford to let your talent sleep.
We 'll take the very worst supposed, as true :
There, the old Duke knew, when he hid his child
Among the river-flowers at Ravestein,
With whom the right lay ! Call the Prince our Duke !

There, she 's no Duchess, she 's no anything
More than a young maid with the bluest eyes :
And now, sirs, we 'll not break this young maid's heart
Coolly as Gaucelme could and would ! No haste !
His talent 's full-blown, ours but in the bud :
We 'll not advance to his perfection yet—
Will we, Sir Maufroy ? See, I 've ruined Maufroy
For ever as a courtier !

Gaucelme. Here 's a coil !

And, count us, will you ? Count its residue,
This boasted convoy, this day last year's crowd !
A birthday, too, a gratulation day !
I 'm dumb : bid that keep silence !

Maufroy and others. Eh, Sir Guibert ?

He 's right : that does say something : that 's bare truth.
Ten—twelve, I make : a perilous dropping off !

Guibert. Pooh—is it audience hour ? The vestibule
Swarms too, I wager, with the common sort
That want our privilege of entry here.

Gaucelme. Adolf ! [*Re-enter ADOLF.*] Who 's outside ?

Guibert. Oh, your looks suffice !
Nobody waiting ?

Maufroy [*looking through the door-folds*]. Scarce our
number !

Guibert. 'Sdeath !
Nothing to beg for, to complain about ?

It can't be! Ill news spreads, but not so fast
As thus to frighten all the world!

Gaucelme.

The world
Lives out of doors, sir—not with you and me
By presence-chamber porches, state-room stairs,
Wherever warmth's perpetual: outside's free
To every wind from every compass-point
And who may get nipped needs be weather-wise.
The Prince comes and the lady's People go;
The snow-goose settles down, the swallows flee—
Why should they wait for winter-time? 'T is instinct.
Don't you feel somewhat chilly?

Guibert.

That's their craft?
And last year's crowd-ers-round and criers-forth
That strewed the garlands, overarched the roads,
Lighted the bonfires, sang the loyal songs!
Well 't is my comfort, you could never call me
The People's Friend! The People keep their word—
I keep my place: don't doubt I'll entertain
The People when the Prince comes, and the People
Are talked of! Then, their speeches—no one tongue
Found respite, not a pen had holiday
—For they wrote, too, as well as spoke, these knaves!
Now see: we tax and tithe them, pill and poll,
They wince and fret enough, but pay they must
—We manage that,—so, pay with a good grace

They might as well, it costs so little more.
But when we've done with taxes, meet folk next
Outside the toll-booth and the rating-place,
In public—there they have us if they will,
We're at their mercy after that, you see!
For one tax not ten devils could extort—
Over and above necessity, a grace;
This prompt disbosoming of love, to wit—
Their vine-leaf wrappage of our tribute penny,
And crowding attestation, all works well.
Yet this precisely do they thrust on us!
These cappings quick, these crook-and-cringings low,
Hand to the heart, and forehead to the knee,
With grin that shuts the eyes and opes the mouth —
So tender they their love; and, tender made,
Go home to curse us, the first *dôit* we ask.
As if their souls were any longer theirs!
As if they had not given ample warrant
To who should clap a collar on their neck,
Rings in their nose, a goad to either flank,
And take them for the brute they boast themselves!
Stay—there's a bustle at the outer door—
And somebody entreating . . . that's my name!
Adolf,—I heard my name!

Adolf.

'T was probably

The suitor.

Guibert. Oh, there is one?

Adolf. With a suit

He'd fain enforce in person.

Guibert. The good heart

—And the great fool! Just ope the mid-door's fold

Is that a lappet of his cloak, I see?

Adolf. If it bear plenteous sign of travel . . . ay,
The very cloak my comrades tore!

Guibert. Why tore?

Adolf. He seeks the Duchess' presence in that trim:
Since daybreak, was he posted hereabouts
Lest he should miss the moment.

Guibert. Where's he now?

Adolf. Gone for a minute possibly, not more:
They have ado enough to thrust him back.

Guibert. Ay—but my name, I caught?

Adolf. Oh, sir—he said
—What was it?—You had known him formerly,
And, he believed, would help him did you guess
He waited now; you promised him as much:
The old plea! 'Faith, he's back,—renews the charge!
Speaking at the door.] So long as the man parleys, peace
outside—

Nor be too ready with your halberts, there!

Gaucelme. My horse bespattered, as he blocked the
path

A thin sour man, not unlike somebody.

Adolf. He holds a paper in his breast, whereon
He glances when his cheeks flush and his brow
At each repulse—

Gaucelme. I noticed he'd a brow.

Adolf. So glancing, he grows calmer, leans awhile
Over the balustrade, adjusts his dress,
And presently turns round, quiet again,
With some new pretext for admittance.—Back!

[*To GUIBERT.*]—Sir, he has seen you! Now cross
halberts! Ha—

Pascal is prostrate—there lies Fabian too!
No passage! Whither would the madman press?
Close the doors quick on me!

Guibert. Too late! He's here.

Enter, hastily and with discomposed dress, VALENCE.

Valence. Sir Guibert, will you help me?—me, that
come

Charged by your townsmen, all who starve at Cleves,
To represent their heights and depths of woe
Before our Duchess and obtain relief!
Such errands barricade such doors, it seems:
But not a common hindrance drives me back
On all the sad yet hopeful faces, lit
With hope for the first time, which sent me forth.

Cleves, speak for me ! Cleves' men and women, speak !
Who followed me—your strongest—many a mile
That I might go the fresher from their ranks,
—Who sit—your weakest—by the city gates,
To take me fuller of what news I bring
As I return—for I must needs return !
—Can I ? 'T were hard, no listener for their wrongs,
To turn them back upon the old despair—
Harder, Sir Guibert, than imploring thus—
So, I do—any way you please—implore !
If you . . . but how should you remember Cleves ?
Yet they of Cleves remember you so well !
Ay, comment on each trait of you they keep,
Your words and deeds caught up at second hand,—
Proud, I believe, at bottom of their hearts,
O' the very levity and recklessness
Which only prove that you forget their wrongs.
Cleves, the grand town, whose men and women starve,
Is Cleves forgotten ? Then, remember me !
You promised me that you would help me once,
For other purpose : will you keep your word ?

Guibert. And who may you be, friend ?

Valence.

Valence of Cleves.

Guibert. Valence of . . . not the advocate of Cleves,
I owed my whole estate to, three years back ?
Ay, well may you keep silence ! Why, my lords,

You 've heard, I 'm sure, how, Pentecost three years,
I was so nearly ousted of my land
By some knave's-pretext—(eh? when you refused me
Your ugly daughter, Clugnet!)—and you 've heard
How I recovered it by miracle
—(When I refused her!) Here 's the very friend,
—Valence of Cleves, all parties have to thank!
Nay, Valence, this procedure 's vile in you!
I 'm no more grateful than a courtier should,
But politic am I—I bear a brain,
Can cast about a little, might require
Your services a second time. I tried
To tempt you with advancement here to court
—“No!”—well, for curiosity at least
To view our life here—“No!”—our Duchess, then,—
A pretty woman 's worth some pains to see,
Nor is she spoiled, I take it, if a crown
Complete the forehead pale and tresses pure . . .

Valence. Our city trusted me its miseries,
And I am come.

Guibert. So much for taste! But “come,”—
So may you be, for anything I know,
To beg the Pope's cross, or Sir Clugnet's daughter,
And with an equal chance you get all three.
If it was ever worth your while to come,
Was not the proper way worth finding too?

Valence. Straight to the palace-portal, sir, I came—

Guibert. —And said?—

Valence. —That I had brought the miseries
Of a whole city to relieve.

Guibert. —Which saying
Won your admittance? You saw me, indeed,
And here, no doubt, you stand: as certainly,
My intervention, I shall not dispute,
Procures you audience; which, if I procure,—
That paper's closely written—by Saint Paul,
Here flock the Wrongs, follow the Remedies,
Chapter and verse, One, Two, A, B and C!
Perhaps you'd enter, make a reverence,
And launch these "miseries" from first to last?

Valence. How should they let me pause or turn aside?

Gaucelme [*to VALENCE*]. My worthy sir, one question!

You've come straight

From Cleves, you tell us: heard you any talk
At Cleves about our lady?

Valence. Much.

Gaucelme. And what?

Valence. Her wish was to redress all wrongs she knew.

Gaucelme. That, you believed?

Valence. You see me, sir!

Gaucelme. —Nor stopped
Upon the road from Cleves to Juliers here,

For any—rumours you might find afloat?

Valence. I had my townsmen's wrongs to busy me.

Gaucelme. This is the lady's birthday, do you know?
—Her day of pleasure?

Valence. —That the great, I know,

For pleasure born, should still be on the watch

To exclude pleasure when a duty offers:

Even as, for duty born, the lowly too

May ever snatch a pleasure if in reach:

Both will have plenty of their birthright, sir!

Gaucelme [*aside to GUIBERT*]. Sir Guibert, here's your
man! No scruples now—

You'll never find his like! Time presses hard.

I've seen your drift and Adolf's too, this while,

But you can't keep the hour of audience back

Much longer, and at noon the Prince arrives.

[*Pointing to VALENCE.*] Entrust him with it—fool no
chance away!

Guibert. Him?

Gaucelme. —With the missive! What's the man
to her?

Guibert. No bad thought! Yet, 't is yours, who ever
played

The tempting serpent: else 't were no bad thought!

I should—and do—mistrust it for your sake,

Or else . . .

Enter an Official who communicates with ADOLF.

Adolf. The Duchess will receive the court.

Guibert. Give us a moment, Adolf! Valence, friend,
I'll help you. We of the service, you're to mark,
Have special entry, while the herd . . . the folk
Outside, get access through our help alone;
—Well, it is so, was so, and I suppose
So ever will be: your natural lot is, therefore,
To wait your turn and opportunity,
And probably miss both. Now, I engage
To set you, here and in a minute's space,
Before the lady, with full leave to plead
Chapter and verse, and A, and B, and C,
To heart's content.

Valence. I grieve that I must ask,—
This being, yourself admit, the custom here,—
'To what the price of such a favour mounts?

Guibert. Just so! You're not without a courtier's tact.
Little at court, as your quick instinct prompts,
Do such as we without a recompense.

Valence. Yours is?—

Guibert. A trifle: here's a document
'T is some one's duty to present her Grace—
I say, not mine—these say, not theirs—such points
Have weight at court. Will you relieve us all

And take it? Just say, "I am bidden lay
"This paper at the Duchess' feet!"

Valence.

No more?

I thank you, sir!

Adolf.

Her Grace receives the court.

Guibert [aside]. Now, *sursum corda*, quoth the mass-
priest! Do—

Whoever 's my kind saint, do let alone
These pushings to and fro, and pullings back;
Peaceably let me hang o' the devil's arm
The downward path, if you can't pluck me off
Completely! Let me live quite his, or yours!

*[The Courtiers begin to range themselves, and move
toward the door.]*

After me, Valence! So, our famous Cleves
Lacks bread? Yet don't we gallants buy their lace?
And dear enough—it beggars me, I know,
To keep my very gloves fringed properly.
This, Valence, is our Great State Hall you cross;
Yon grey urn 's veritable marcasite,
The Pope's gift: and those salvers testify
The Emperor. Presently you 'll set your foot
. . . But you don't speak, friend Valence!

Valence.

I shall speak.

Gaucelme [aside to GUIBERT]. Guibert—it were no
such ungraceful thing

If you and I, at first, seemed horror-struck
With the bad news. Look here, what you shall do
Suppose you, first, clap hand to sword and cry
“Yield strangers our allegiance? First I ’ll perish
“Beside your Grace!”—and so give me the cue
To . . .

Guibert. —Clap your hand to note-book and jot down
That to regale the Prince with? I conceive.

[*To VALENCE.*] Do, Valence, speak, or I shall half
suspect

You ’re plotting to supplant us, me the first,
I’ the lady’s favour! Is ’t the grand harangue
You mean to make, that thus engrosses you?
—Which of her virtues you ’ll apostrophize?
Or is ’t the fashion you aspire to start,
Of that close-curved, not unbecoming hair?
Or what else ponder you?

Valence.

My townsmen’s wrongs.

ACT II.

NOON.

SCENE.—*The Presence-chamber.**The DUCHESS and SABYNE.**The Duchess.* Announce that I am ready for the court!*Sabyne.* 'Tis scarcely audience-hour, I think; your
GraceMay best consult your own relief, no doubt,
And shun the crowd: but few can have arrived.*The Duchess.* Let those not yet arrived, then, keep
away!'T was me, this day last year at Ravestein,
You hurried. It has been full time, beside,
This half-hour. Do you hesitate?*Sabyne.* Forgive me!*The Duchess.* Stay, Sabyne; let me hasten to make
sureOf one true thanker: here with you begins
My audience, claim you first its privilege!

It is my birth's event they celebrate :
 You need not wish me more such happy days,
 But—ask some favour ! Have you none to ask ?
 Has Adolf none, then ? this was far from least
 Of much I waited for impatiently,
 Assure yourself ! It seemed so natural
 Your gift, beside this bunch of river-bells,
 Should be the power and leave of doing good
 To you, and greater pleasure to myself.
 You ask my leave to-day to marry Adolf ?
 The rest is my concern.

Sabyne. Your Grace is ever

Our lady of dear Ravestein,—but, for Adolf . . .

The Duchess. “But” ? You have not, sure, changed in
 your regard

And purpose towards him ?

Sabyne. We change ?

The Duchess. Well then ? Well ?

Sabyne. How could we two be happy, and, most like,
 Leave Juliers, when—when . . . but 't is audience-
 time !

The Duchess. “When, if you left me, I were left
 indeed !”

Would you subjoin that ?—Bid the court approach !
 —Why should we play thus with each other, Sabyne ?
 Do I not know, if courtiers prove remiss,

If friends detain me, and get blame for it,
There is a cause? Of last year's fervid throng
Scarce one half comes now.

Sabyne [*aside*]. One half? No, alas!

The Duchess. So can the mere suspicion of a cloud
Over my fortunes, strike each loyal heart.
They've heard of this Prince Berthold; and, forsooth,
Some foolish arrogant pretence he makes,
May grow more foolish and more arrogant,
They please to apprehend! I thank their love.
Admit them!

Sabyne [*aside*]. How much has she really learned?

The Duchess. Surely, whoever's absent, Tristan waits?
—Or at least Romuald, whom my father raised
From nothing—come, he's faithful to me, come!
(*Sabyne*, I should but be the prouder—yes,
The fitter to comport myself aright)
Not Romuald? Xavier—what said he to that?
For Xavier hates a parasite, I know! [*SABYNE goes out.*]

The Duchess. Well, sunshine's everywhere, and
summer too.

Next year 't is the old place again, perhaps—
The water-breeze again, the birds again.
—It cannot be! It is too late to be!
What part had I, or choice in all of it?
Hither they brought me; I had not to think

Nor care, concern myself with doing good
Or ill, my task was just—to live,—to live,
And, answering ends there was no need explain,
To render Juliers happy—so they said.
All could not have been falsehood : some was love,
And wonder and obedience. I did all
They looked for : why then cease to do it now ?
Yet this is to be calmly set aside,
And—ere next birthday's dawn, for aught I know,
Things change, a claimant may arrive, and I . . .
It cannot nor it shall not be ! His right ?
Well then, he has the right, and I have not,
—But who bade all of you surround my life
And close its growth up with your ducal crown
Which, plucked off rudely, leaves me perishing ?
I could have been like one of you,—loved, hoped,
Feared, lived and died like one of you—but you
Would take that life away and give me this,
And I will keep this ! I will face you ! Come !

Enter the Courtiers and VALENCE.

The Courtiers. Many such happy mornings to your
Grace !

The Duchess [*aside, as they pay their devoir*]. The
same words, the same faces,—the same love !
I have been overfearful. These are few ;

But these, at least, stand firmly : these are mine.
 As many come as may ; and if no more,
 'T is that these few suffice—they do suffice !
 What succour may not next year bring me ? Plainly,
 I feared too soon. [*To the Courtiers.*] I thank you, sirs :
 all thanks !

Valence [*aside, as the DUCHESS passes from one group
 to another, conversing*].

'T is she—the vision this day last year brought,
 When, for a golden moment at our Cleves,
 She tarried in her progress hither. Cleves
 Chose me to speak its welcome, and I spoke
 —Not that she could have noted the recluse
 —Ungainly, old before his time—who gazed.
 Well, Heaven's gifts are not wasted, and that gaze
 Kept, and shall keep me to the end, her own !
 She was above it—but so would not sink
 My gaze to earth ! The People caught it, hers—
 Thenceforward, mine ; but thus entirely mine,
 Who shall affirm, had she not raised my soul
 Ere she retired and left me—them ? She turns—
 There's all her wondrous face at once ! The ground
 Reels and . . . [*suddenly occupying himself with his paper*]
 These wrongs of theirs I have to plead !
The Duchess [*to the Courtiers*]. Nay, compliment
 enough ! and kindness' self

Should pause before it wish me more such years.
 'T was fortunate that thus, ere youth escaped,
 I tasted life's pure pleasure—one such, pure,
 Is worth a thousand, mixed—and youth's for pleasure :
 Mine is received ; let my age pay for it.

Gaucelme. So, pay, and pleasure paid for, thinks your
 Grace,
 Should never go together ?

Guibert. How, Sir Gaucelme ?
 Hurry one's feast down unenjoyingly
 At the snatched breathing-intervals of work ?
 As good you saved it till the dull day's-end
 When, stiff and sleepy, appetite is gone.
 Eat first, then work upon the strength of food !

The Duchess. True : you enable me to risk my
 future,
 By giving me a past beyond recall.
 I lived, a girl, one happy leisure year :
 Let me endeavour to be the Duchess now !
 And so,—what news, Sir Guibert, spoke you of ?

[*As they advance a little, and GUIBERT speaks —*
 —That gentleman ?

Valence [aside]. I feel her eyes on me.

Guibert [to VALENCE]. The Duchess, sir, inclines to
 hear your suit.

Advance ! He is from Cleves.

Valence [*coming forward. Aside*]. Their wrongs—their wrongs!

The Duchess. And you, sir, are from Cleves? How fresh in mind,

The hour or two I passed at queenly Cleves!
She entertained me bravely, but the best
Of her good pageant seemed its standers-by
With insuppressive joy on every face!
What says my ancient famous happy Cleves?

Valence. Take the truth, lady—you are made for truth!
So think my friends: nor do they less deserve
The having you to take it, you shall think,
When you know all—nay, when you only know
How, on that day you recollect at Cleves,
When the poor acquiescing multitude
Who thrust themselves with all their woes apart
Into unnoticed corners, that the few,
Their means sufficed to muster trappings for,
Might fill the foreground, occupy your sight
With joyous faces fit to bear away
And boast of as a sample of all Cleves
—How, when to daylight these crept out once more,
Clutching, unconscious, each his empty rags
Whence the scant coin, which had not half bought
bread,
That morn he shook forth, counted piece by piece,

And, well-advisedly, on perfumes spent them
To burn, or flowers to strew, before your path
—How, when the golden flood of music and bliss
Ebb'd, as their moon retreated, and again
Left the sharp black-point rocks of misery bare
—Then I, their friend, had only to suggest
“Saw she the horror as she saw the pomp!”
And as one man they cried “He speaks the truth :
“Show her the horror! Take from our own mouths
“Our wrongs and show them, she will see them too!”
This they cried, lady! I have brought the wrongs.

The Duchess. Wrongs? Cleves has wrongs—apparent
now and thus?

I thank you! In that paper? Give it me!

Valence. (There, Cleves!) In this! (What did I
promise, Cleves?)

Our weavers, clothiers, spinners are reduced
Since . . . Oh, I crave your pardon! I forget
I buy the privilege of this approach,
And promptly would discharge my debt. I lay
This paper humbly at the Duchess' feet.

[*Presenting GUIBERT'S paper.*

Guibert. Stay! for the present . . .

The Duchess. Stay, sir? I take aught
That teaches me their wrongs with greater pride
Than this your ducal circlet. Thank you, sir!

[*The DUCHESS reads hastily; then, turning to the Courtiers—*

What have I done to you ? Your deed or mine
Was it, this crowning me ? I gave myself
No more a title to your homage, no,
Than church-flowers, born this season, wrote the words
In the saint's-book that sanctified them first.
For such a flower, you plucked me ; well, you erred—
Well, 't was a weed ; remove the eye-sore quick !
But should you not remember it has lain
Steeped in the candles' glory, palely shrined,
Nearer God's Mother than most earthly things ?
—That if 't be faded 't is with prayer's sole breath—
That the one day it boasted was God's day ?
Still, I do thank you ! Had you used respect,
Here might I dwindle to my last white leaf,
Here lose life's latest freshness, which even yet
May yield some wandering insect rest and food :
So, fling me forth, and—all is best for all !

[*After a pause.*] Prince Berthold, who art Juliers' Duke
it seems—

The King's choice, and the Emperor's, and the Pope's—
Be mine, too ! Take this People ! Tell not me
Of rescripts, precedents, authorities,
—But take them, from a heart that yearns to give !
Find out their love,—I could not ; find their fear,—

I would not ; find their like,—I never shall,
 Among the flowers ! *[Taking off her coronet.*

Colombe of Ravestein

Thanks God she is no longer Duchess here !

Valence [*advancing to* GUIBERT]. Sir Guibert, knight,
 they call you—this of mine

Is the first step I ever set at court.

You dared make me your instrument, I find ;

For that, so sure as you and I are men,

We reckon to the utmost presently :

But as you are a courtier and I none,

Your knowledge may instruct me. I, already,

Have too far outraged, by my ignorance

Of courtier-ways, this lady, to proceed

A second step and risk addressing her :

—I am degraded—you let me address !

Out of her presence, all is plain enough

What I shall do—but in her presence, too,

Surely there's something proper to be done.

[To the others.] You, gentles, tell me if I guess aright—

May I not strike this man to earth ?

The Courtiers [*as* GUIBERT *springs forward, with-*
holding him]. Let go !

—The clothiers' spokesman, Guibert ? Grace a churl ?

The Duchess [*to* VALENCE]. Oh, be acquainted with
 your party, sir !

He 's of the oldest lineage Juliers boasts ;
A lion crests him for a cognizance
“ Scorning to waver ”—that 's his 'scutcheon's word ;
His office with the new Duke—probably
The same in honour as with me ; or more,
By so much as this gallant turn deserves.
He 's now, I dare say, of a thousand times
The rank and influence that remain with her
Whose part you take ! So, lest for taking it
You suffer . . .

Valence. I may strike him then to earth ?

Guibert [*falling on his knee*]. Great and dear lady,
pardon me ! Hear once !

Believe me and be merciful—be just !

I could not bring myself to give that paper

Without a keener pang than I dared meet

—And so felt Clugnet here, and Maufroy here

—No one dared meet it. Protestation 's cheap,—

But, if to die for you did any good,

[*To GAUCELME.*] Would not I die, sir ? Say your worst
of me !

But it does no good, that 's the mournful truth.

And since the hint of a resistance, even,

Would just precipitate, on you the first,

A speedier ruin—I shall not deny,

Saving myself indubitable pain,

I thought to give you pleasure (who might say?)
 By showing that your only subject found
 To carry the sad notice, was the man
 Precisely ignorant of its contents ;
 A nameless, mere provincial advocate ;
 One whom 't was like you never saw before,
 Never would see again. All has gone wrong ;
 But I meant right, God knows, and you, I trust !

The Duchess. A nameless advocate, this gentleman ?
 —(I pardon you, Sir Guibert !)

Guibert [*rising, to VALENCE*]. Sir, and you ?

Valence. —Rejoice that you are lightened of a load.
 Now, you have only me to reckon with.

The Duchess. One I have never seen, much less
 obliged ?

Valence. Dare I speak, lady ?

The Duchess. Dare you ! Heard you not
 I rule no longer ?

Valence. Lady, if your rule
 Were based alone on such a ground as these

[*Pointing to the Courtiers.*
 Could furnish you,—abjure it ! They have hidden
 A source of true dominion from your sight.

The Duchess. You hear them—no such source is
 left . . .

Valence. Hear Cleves !

Whose haggard craftsmen rose to starve this day,
Starve now, and will lie down at night to starve,
Sure of a like to-morrow—but as sure
Of a most unlike morrow-after-that,
Since end things must, end howsoe'er things may.
What curbs the brute-force instinct in its hour?
What makes—instead of rising, all as one,
And teaching fingers, so expert to wield
Their tool, the broadsword's play or carbine's trick,
—What makes that there's an easier help, they think,
For you, whose name so few of them can spell,
Whose face scarce one in every hundred saw,—
You simply have to understand their wrongs,
And wrongs will vanish—so, still trades are plied,
And swords lie rusting, and myself stand here?
There is a vision in the heart of each
Of justice, mercy, wisdom, tenderness
To wrong and pain, and knowledge of its cure:
And these embodied in a woman's form
That best transmits them, pure as first received,
From God above her, to mankind below.
Will you derive your rule from such a ground,
Or rather hold it by the suffrage, say,
Of this man—this—and this?

The Duchess [after a pause]. You come from Cleves:
How many are at Cleves of such a mind?

Valence [*from his paper*]. "We, all the manufacturers of Cleves—"

The Duchess. Or stay, sir—lest I seem too covetous—
Are you my subject? such as you describe,
Am I to you, though to no other man?

Valence [*from his paper*]. —"Valence, ordained your Advocate at Cleves"—

The Duchess [*replacing the coronet*]. Then I remain
Cleves' Duchess! Take you note,
While Cleves but yields one subject of this stamp,
I stand her lady till she waves me off!
For her sake, all the Prince claims I withhold;
Laugh at each menace; and, his power defying,
Return his missive with its due contempt!

[*Casting it away.*]

Guibert [*picking it up*].—Which to the Prince I will
deliver, lady,
(Note it down, Gaucelme)—with your message too!

The Duchess. I think the office is a subject's, sir!
—Either . . . how style you him?—my special
guarder

The Marshal's—for who knows but violence
May follow the delivery?—Or, perhaps,
My Chancellor's—for law may be to urge
On its receipt!—Or, even my Chamberlain's—
For I may violate established form!

[*To VALENCE.*] Sir,—for the half-hour till this service ends,

Will you become all these to me?

Valence [*falling on his knee*]. My liege!

The Duchess. Give me!

[*The Courtiers present their badges of office.*

[*Putting them by.*] Whatever was their virtue once,

They need new consecration. [*Raising VALENCE.*] Are you mine?

I will be Duchess yet!

[*She retires.*

The Courtiers. Our Duchess yet!

A glorious lady! Worthy love and dread!

I'll stand by her,—And I, whate'er betide!

Guibert [*to VALENCE*]. Well done, well done, sir! I care not who knows,

You have done nobly and I envy you—

Tho' I am but unfairly used, I think:

For when one gets a place like this I hold,

One gets too the remark that its mere wages,

The pay and the preferment, make our prize.

Talk about zeal and faith apart from these,

We're laughed at—much would zeal and faith subsist

Without these also! Yet, let these be stopped,

Our wages discontinue,—then, indeed,

Our zeal and faith, (we hear on every side,)

Are not released—having been pledged away
 I wonder, for what zeal and faith in turn?
 Hard money purchased me my place! No, no—
 I'm right, sir—but your wrong is better still,
 If I had time and skill to argue it.
 Therefore, I say, I'll serve you, how you please—
 If you like,—fight you, as you seem to wish—
 (The kinder of me that, in sober truth,
 I never dreamed I did you any harm) . . .

Gauclme. —Or, kinder still, you'll introduce, no
 doubt,

His merits to the Prince who's just at hand,
 And let no hint drop he's made Chancellor
 And Chamberlain and Heaven knows what beside!

Clugnet [to VALENCE]. You stare, young sir, and
 threaten! Let me say,
 That at your age, when first I came to court,
 I was not much above a gentleman;
 While now . . .

Valence. —You are Head-Lackey? With your
 office

I have not yet been graced, sir!

Other Courtiers [to CLUGNET]. Let him talk!
 Fidelity, disinterestedness,
 Excuse so much! Men claim my worship ever
 Who staunchly and steadfastly . . .

Enter ADOLF.

Adolf. The Prince arrives.

Courtiers. Ha? How?

Adolf. He leaves his guard a stage behind
At Aix, and enters almost by himself.

1st Courtier. The Prince! This foolish business puts
all out.

2nd Courtier. Let Gaucelme speak first!

3rd Courtier. Better I began
About the state of Juliers: should one say
All's prosperous and inviting him?

4th Courtier. —Or rather,
All's prostrate and imploring him?

5th Courtier. That's best.
Where's the Cleves' paper, by the way?

4th Courtier [*to VALENCE*]. Sir—sir—
If you'll but lend that paper—trust it me,
I'll warrant . . .

5th Courtier. Softly, sir—the Marshal's duty!

Clugnet. Has not the Chamberlain a hearing first
By virtue of his patent?

Gaucelme. Patents?—Duties?
All that, my masters, must begin again!

One word composes the whole controversy:
We're simply now—the Prince's!

The Others. Ay—the Prince's!

Enter Sabyne.

Sabyne. Adolf! Bid . . . Oh, no time for ceremony!
Where's whom our lady calls her only subject?
She needs him. Who is here the Duchess's?

Valence [*starting from his reverie*] Most gratefully I
follow to her feet.

ACT III.

AFTERNOON.

SCENE.—*The Vestibule.**Enter* PRINCE BERTHOLD *and* MELCHIOR.

Berthold. A thriving little burgh this Juliers looks.
[*Half-apart.*] Keep Juliers, and as good you kept
Cologne :
Better try Aix, though !—

Melchior. Please 't your Highness speak?

Berthold [*as before*]. Aix, Cologne, Frankfort,—Milan ;
—Rome !—

Melchior. The Grave.

More weary seems your Highness, I remark,
Than sundry conquerors whose path I 've watched
Through fire and blood to any prize they gain.
I could well wish you, for your proper sake,
Had met some shade of opposition here
—Found a blunt seneschal refuse unlock,
Or a scared usher lead your steps astray.

You must not look for next achievement's palm
So easily : this will hurt your conquering.

Berthold. My next? Ay, as you say, my next and
next !

Well, I am tired, that 's truth, and moody too,
This quiet entrance-morning : listen why !
Our little burgh, now, Juliers—'t is indeed
One link, however insignificant,
Of the great chain by which I reach my hope,
—A link I must secure ; but otherwise,
You 'd wonder I esteem it worth my grasp.
Just see what life is, with its shifts and turns !
It happens now—this very nook—to be
A place that once . . . not a long while since, neither—
When I lived an ambiguous hanger-on
Of foreign courts, and bore my claims about,
Discarded by one kinsman, and the other
A poor priest merely,—then, I say, this place
Shone my ambition's object ; to be Duke—
Seemed then, what to be Emperor seems now.
My rights were far from judged as plain and sure
In those days as of late, I promise you :
And 't was my day-dream, Lady Colombe here
Might e'en compound the matter, pity me,
Be struck, say, with my chivalry and grace
(I was a boy !)—bestow her hand at length,

And make me Duke, in her right if not mine.
Here am I, Duke confessed, at Juliers now.
Hearken : if ever I be Emperor,
Remind me what I felt and said to-day !

Melchior. All this consoles a bookish man like me.
—And so will weariness cling to you. Wrong,
Wrong ! Had you sought the lady's court yourself,—
Faced the redoubtables composing it,
Flattered this, threatened that man, bribed the other,—
Pleaded by writ and word and deed, your cause,—
Conquered a footing inch by painful inch,—
And, after long years' struggle, pounced at last
On her for prize,—the right life had been lived,
And justice done to divers faculties
Shut in that brow. Yourself were visible
As you stood victor, then ; whom now—(your pardon !)
I am forced narrowly to search and see,
So are you hid by helps—this Pope, your uncle—
Your cousin, the other King ! You are a mind,—
They, body : too much of mere legs-and-arms
Obstructs the mind so ! Match these with their like :
Match mind with mind !

Berthold. And where's your mind to match ?
They show me legs-and-arms to cope withal !
I'd subjugate this city—where's its mind ?

[*The Courtiers enter slowly.*

Melchior. Got out of sight when you came troops and
all!

And in its stead, here greets you flesh-and-blood :
A smug economy of both, this first !

[*As CLUGNET bows obsequiously.*

Well done, gout, all considered !—I may go ?

Berthold. Help me receive them !

Melchior. Oh, they just will say

What yesterday at Aix their fellows said

At Treves, the day before ! Sir Prince, my friend,

Why do you let your life slip thus ?—Meantime,

I have my little Julfers to achieve—

The understanding this tough Platonist,

Your holy uncle disinterred, Amelius :

Lend me a company of horse and foot,

To help me through his tractate—gain my Duchy !

Berthold. And Empire, after that is gained, will be—?

Melchior. To help me through your uncle's comment,
Prince !

[*Goes.*

Berthold. Ah ? Well : he o'er-refines—the scholar's
fault !

How do I let my life slip ? Say, this life,

I lead now, differs from the common life

Of other men in mere degree, not kind,

Of joys and griefs,—still there is such degree

Mere largeness in a life is something, sure,—

Enough to care about and struggle for,
In this world : for this world, the size of things ;
The sort of things, for that to come, no doubt.
A great is better than a little aim :
And when I wooed Priscilla's rosy mouth
And failed so, under that grey convent-wall,
Was I more happy than I should be now

[*By this time, the Courtiers are ranged before him.*

If failing of my Empire? Not a whit.

—Here comes the mind, it once had tasked me sore

To baffle, but for my advantages !

All 's best as 't is : these scholars talk and talk.

[*Sits himself.*

The Courtiers. Welcome our Prince to Juliers !—to his
heritage !

Our dutifullest service proffer we !

Clugnet. I, please your Highness, having exercised
The function of Grand Chamberlain at court,
With much acceptance, as men testify . . .

Berthold. I cannot greatly thank you, gentlemen !
The Pope declares my claim to the Duchy founded
On strictest justice—you concede it, therefore,
I do not wonder : and the kings my friends
Protest they mean to see such claim enforced,—
You easily may offer to assist.
But there 's a slight discretionary power

To serve me in the matter, you 've had long,
 Though late you use it. This is well to say—
 But could you not have said it months ago?
 I'm not denied my own Duke's truncheon, true—
 'T is flung me—I stoop down, and from the ground
 Pick it, with all you placid standers-by:
 And now I have it, gems and mire at once,
 Grace go with it to my soiled hands, you say!

Guibert. (By Paul, the advocate our doughty friend
 Cuts the best figure!)

Gaucelme. If our ignorance
 May have offended, sure our loyalty . . .

Berthold. Loyalty? Yours? Oh—of yourselves you
 speak!

I mean the Duchess all this time, I hope!
 And since I have been forced repeat my claims
 As if they never had been urged before,
 As I began, so must I end, it seems.
 The formal answer to the grave demand!
 What says the lady?

Courtiers [*one to another*]. *1st Courtier.* Marshal!

2nd Courtier. Orator!

Guibert. A variation of our mistress' way!

Wipe off his boots' dust, Clugnet!—that, he waits!

1st Courtier. Your place!

2nd Courtier. Just now it was your own!

Guibert. The devil's!

Berthold [*to* GUIBERT]. Come forward, friend—you
with the paper, there!

Is Juliers the first city I've obtained?

By this time, I may boast proficiency

In each decorum of the circumstance.

Give it me as she gave it—the petition,

Demand, you style it! What's required, in brief?

What title's reservation, appanage's

Allowance? I heard all at Treves, last week.

Gaucelme [*to* GUIBERT]. "Give it him as she gave it!"

Guibert. And why not?

[*To* BERTHOLD.] The lady crushed your summons thus
together,

And bade me, with the very greatest scorn

So fair a frame could hold, inform you . . .

Courtiers. Stop—

Idiot!

Guibert. —Inform you she denied your claim,

Defied yourself! (I tread upon his heel,

The blustering advocate!)

Berthold. By heaven and earth!

Dare you jest, sir?

Guibert. Did they at Treves, last week?

Berthold [*starting up*]. Why then, I look much bolder
than I knew,

And you prove better actors than I thought :
Since, as I live, I took you as you entered
For just so many dearest friends of mine,
Fled from the sinking to the rising power
—The sneaking'st crew, in short, I e'er despised !
Whereas, I am alone here for the moment,
With every soldier left behind at Aix !
Silence ? That means the worst ? I thought as much !
What follows next then ?

Courtiers. Gracious Prince, he raves !

Guibert. He asked the truth and why not get the
truth ?

Berthold. Am I a prisoner ? Speak, will somebody ?
—But why stand paltering with imbeciles ?
Let me see her, or . . .

Guibert. Her, without her leave,
Shall no one see : she's Duchess yet !

Courtiers [*footsteps without, as they are disputing*].
Good chance !

She's here—the Lady Colombe's self !

Berthold. 'T is well !

[*Aside.*] Array a handful thus against my world ?
Not ill done, truly ! Were not this a mind
To match one's mind with ? Colombe ! Let us wait !
I failed so, under that grey convent wall !
She comes.

Guibert. The Duchess! Strangers, range yourselves!

[*As the DUCHESS enters in conversation with
VALENCE, BERTHOLD and the Courtiers fall
back a little.*

The Duchess. Presagefully it beats, presagefully,
My heart: the right is Berthold's and not mine.

Valence. Grant that he has the right, dare I mistrust
Your power to acquiesce so patiently
As you believe, in such a dream-like change
Of fortune—change abrupt, profound, complete?

The Duchess. Ah, the first bitterness is over now!
Bitter I may have felt it to confront
The truth, and ascertain those natures' value
I had so counted on; that was a pang:
But I did bear it, and the worst is over.
Let the Prince take them!

Valence. And take Juliers too?
—Your people without crosses, wands and chains—
Only with hearts?

The Duchess. There I feel guilty, sir!
I cannot give up what I never had:
For I ruled these, not them—these stood between.
Shall I confess, sir? I have heard by stealth
Of Berthold from the first; more news and more:
Closer and closer swam the thundercloud,
But I was safely housed with these, I knew.

At times when to the casement I would turn,
At a bird's passage or a flower-trail's play,
I caught the storm's red glimpses on its edge—
Yet I was sure some one of all these friends
Would interpose: I followed the bird's flight
Or plucked the flower: some one would interpose!

Valence. Not one thought on the People—and Cleves
there!

The Duchess. Now, sadly conscious my real sway was
missed,
Its shadow goes without so much regret:
Else could I not again thus calmly bid you,
Answer Prince Berthold!

Valence. Then you acquiesce?

The Duchess. Remember over whom it was I ruled!

Guibert [stepping forward]. Prince Berthold, yonder,
craves an audience, lady!

The Duchess [to VALENCE]. I only have to turn, and I
shall face

Prince Berthold! Oh, my very heart is sick!
It is the daughter of a line of Dukes
This scornful insolent adventurer
Will bid depart from my dead father's halls!
I shall not answer him—dispute with him—
But, as he bids, depart! Prevent it, sir!
Sir—but a mere day's respite! Urge for me

—What I shall call to mind I should have urged
 When time's gone by : 't will all be mine, you urge !
 A day—an hour—that I myself may lay
 My rule down ! 'T is too sudden—must not be !
 The world's to hear of it ! Once done—for ever !
 How will it read, sir ? How be sung about ?
 Prevent it !

Berthold [*approaching*]. Your frank indignation, lady,
 Cannot escape me. Overbold I seem ;
 But somewhat should be pardoned my surprise
 At this reception,—this defiance, rather.
 And if, for their and your sake, I rejoice
 Your virtues could inspire a trusty few
 To make such gallant stand in your behalf,
 I cannot but be sorry, for my own,
 Your friends should force me to retrace my steps :
 Since I no longer am permitted speak
 After the pleasant peaceful course prescribed
 No less by courtesy than relationship—
 Which I remember, if you once forgot.
 But never must attack pass unrepelled.
 Suffer that, through you, I demand of these,
 Who controverts my claim to Juliers ?

The Duchess.

—Me

You say, you do not speak to—

Berthold.

Of your subjects

I ask, then : whom do you accredit ? Where
Stand those should answer ?

Valence [*advancing*]. The lady is alone.

Berthold. Alone, and thus ? So weak and yet so
bold ?

Valence. I said she was alone--

Berthold. And weak, I said.

Valence. When is man strong until he feels alone ?

It was some lonely strength at first, be sure,
Created organs, such as those you seek,
By which to give its varied purpose shape :
And, naming the selected ministrants,
Took sword, and shield, and sceptre,—each, a man !
That strength performed its work and passed its way :
You see our lady : there, the old shapes stand !
—A Marshal, Chamberlain, and Chancellor—
“ Be helped their way, into their death put life
“ And find advantage ! ”—so you counsel us.
But let strength feel alone, seek help itself,—
And, as the inland-hatched sea-creature hunts
The sea's breast out,—as, littered 'mid the waves
The desert-brute makes for the desert's joy,
So turns our lady to her true resource,
Passing o'er hollow fictions, worn-out types,
—And I am first her instinct fastens on.
And prompt I say, as clear as heart can speak,

The People will not have you ; nor shall have !
It is not merely I shall go bring Cleves
And fight you to the last,—though that does much,
And men and children,—ay, and women too,
Fighting for home, are rather to be feared
Than mercenaries fighting for their pay—
But, say you beat us, since such things have been,
And, where this Juliers laughed, you set your foot
Upon a steaming bloody plash—what then ?
Stand you the more our lord that there you stand ?
Lord it o'er troops whose force you concentrate,
A pillared flame whereto all ardours tend—
Lord it 'mid priests whose schemes you amplify,
A cloud of smoke 'neath which all shadows brood—
But never, in this gentle spot of earth,
Can you become our Colombe, our play-queen,
For whom, to furnish lilies for her hair,
We 'd pour our veins forth to enrich the soil.
—Our conqueror ? Yes !—Our despot ? Yes !—Our
Duke ?

Know yourself, know us !

Berthold [*who has been in thought*]. Know your lady,
also !

[*Very deferentially*.]—To whom I needs must exculpate
myself

For having made a rash demand, at least.

Wherefore to you, sir, who appear to be
 Her chief adviser, I submit my claims, [*Giving papers.*
 But, this step taken, take no further step,
 Until the Duchess shall pronounce their worth.
 Here be our meeting-place ; at night, its time :
 Till when I humbly take the lady's leave !

[*He withdraws. As the DUCHESS turns to*
 VALENCE, *the Courtiers interchange glances*
and come forward a little.

1st Courtier. So, this was their device !

2nd Courtier. No bad device !

3rd Courtier. You'd say they love each other, Gui-
 bert's friend

From Cleves, and she, the Duchess !

4th Courtier. —And moreover,

That all Prince Berthold comes for, is to help
 Their loves !

5th Courtier. Pray, Guibert, what is next to do ?

Guibert [*advancing*]. I laid my office at the Duchess'
 foot—

Others. And I—and I—and I !

The Duchess. I took them, sirs.

Guibert [*apart to VALENCE*]. And now, sir, I am
 simple knight again—

Guibert, of the great ancient house, as yet
 That never bore affront ; whate'er your birth,—

As things stand now, I recognize yourself
(If you 'll accept experience of some date)
As like to be the leading man o' the time,
'Therefore as much above me now, as I
Seemed above you this morning. Then, I offered
To fight you : will you be as generous
And now fight me ?

Valence. Ask when my life is mine !

Guibert. ('T is hers now !)

Clugnet [*apart to VALENCE, as GUIBERT turns from him*]. You, sir, have insulted me

Grossly,—will grant me, too, the selfsame favour
You 've granted him, just now, I make no question ?

Valence. I promise you, as him, sir.

Clugnet. Do you so ?

Handsomely said ! I hold you to it, sir.

You 'll get me reinstated in my office

As you will Guibert !

The Duchess. I would be alone !

[*They begin to retire slowly ; as VALENCE is about to follow—*

Alone, sir—only with my heart : you stay !

Gaucelme. You hear that ? Ah, light breaks upon me !

Cleves—

It was at Cleves some man harangued us all—

With great effect,—so those who listened said,

My thoughts being busy elsewhere : was this he ?

Guibert,—your strange, disinterested man !

Your uncorrupted, if uncourtly friend !

The modest worth you mean to patronize !

He cares about no Duchesses, not he—

His sole concern is with the wrongs of Cleves !

What, Guibert ? What, it breaks on you at last ?

Guibert. Would this hall's floor were a mine's roof !

I 'd back

And in her very face . . .

Gaucelme. Apply the match

That fired the train,—and where would you be, pray ?

Guibert. With him !

Gaucelme. Stand, rather, safe outside with me !

The mine 's charged : shall I furnish you the match

And place you properly ? To the antechamber !

Guibert. Can you ?

Gaucelme. Try me ! Your friend 's in fortune !

Guibert. Quick—

To the antechamber ! He is pale with bliss !

Gaucelme. No wonder ! Mark her eyes !

Guibert. To the antechamber !

[*The Courtiers retire.*

The Duchess. Sir, could you know all you have done
for me

You were content ! You spoke, and I am saved.

Valence. Be not too sanguine, lady! Ere you dream,
That transient flush of generosity
Fades off, perchance. The man, beside, is gone,—
Him we might bend; but see, the papers here—
Inalterably his requirement stays,
And cold hard words have we to deal with now.
In that large eye there seemed a latent pride,
To self-denial not incompetent,
But very like to hold itself dispensed
From such a grace: however, let us hope!
He is a noble spirit in noble form.
I wish he less had bent that brow to smile
As with the fancy how he could subject
Himself upon occasion to—himself!
From rudeness, violence, you rest secure;
But do not think your Duchy rescued yet!

The Duchess. You,—who have opened a new world
to me,
Will never take the faded language up
Of that I leave? My Duchy—keeping it,
Or losing it—is that my sole world now?

Valence. Ill have I spoken if you thence despise
Juliers; although the lowest, on true grounds,
Be worth more than the highest rule, on false:
Aspire to rule, on the true grounds!

The Duchess.

Nay, hear—

False, I will never—rash, I would not be !
This is indeed my birthday—soul and body,
Its hours have done on me the work of years.
You hold the requisition : ponder it !
If I have right, my duty 's plain : if he—
Say so, nor ever change a tone of voice !
At night you meet the Prince ; meet me at eve !
Till when, farewell ! This discomposes you ?
Believe in your own nature, and its force
Of renovating mine ! I take my stand
Only as under me the earth is firm :
So, prove the first step stable, all will prove.
That first, I choose : [*Laying her hand on his.*—the next
to take, choose you ! [*She withdraws.*
Valence [*after a pause*]. What drew down this on me ?
—on me, dead once,
She thus bids live,—since all I hitherto
Thought dead in me, youth's ardours and emprise,
Burst into life before her, as she bids
Who needs them. Whither will this reach, where end ?
Her hand's print burns on mine . . . Yet she 's above—
So very far above me ! All 's too plain :
I served her when the others sank away,
And she rewards me as such souls reward—
The changed voice, the suffusion of the cheek,
The eye's acceptance, the expressive hand,

—Reward, that's little, in her generous thought,
Though all to me . . .

I cannot so disclaim
Heaven's gift, nor call it other than it is!
She loves me!

[*Looking at the Prince's papers.*]—Which love, these,
perchance, forbid.

Can I decide against myself—pronounce
She is the Duchess and no mate for me?

—Cleves, help me! Teach me,—every haggard face,—
To sorrow and endure! I will do right
Whatever be the issue. Help me, Cleves!

ACT IV.

EVENING.

SCENE.—*An Antechamber.**Enter the Courtiers.*

Maufroy. Now, then, that we may speak—how spring
this mine?

Gauclme. Is Guibert ready for its match? He cools!
Not so friend Valence with the Duchess there!
“Stay, Valence! Are not you my better self?”
And her cheek mantled—

Guibert. Well, she loves him, sir:
And more,—since you will have it I grow cool,—
She's right: he's worth it.

Gauclme. For his deeds to-day?
Say so!

Guibert. What should I say beside?

Gauclme. Not this—
For friendship's sake leave this for me to say—
That we're the dupes of an egregious cheat!

This plain unpractised suitor, who found way
 To the Duchess through the merest die's turn-up
 A year ago, had seen her and been seen,
 Loved and been loved.

Guibert. Impossible !

Gaucelme. —Nor say,

How sly and exquisite a trick, moreover,
 Was this which—taking not their stand on facts
 Boldly, for that had been endurable,
 But worming on their way by craft, they choose
 Resort to, rather,—and which you and we,
 Sheep-like, assist them in the playing-off !
 The Duchess thus parades him as preferred,
 Not on the honest ground of preference,
 Seeing first, liking more, and there an end—
 But as we all had started equally,
 And at the close of a fair race he proved
 The only valiant, sage and loyal man.
 Herself, too, with the pretty fits and starts,—
 The careless, winning, candid ignorance
 Of what the Prince might challenge or forego—
 She had a hero in reserve ! What risk
 Ran she ? This deferential easy Prince
 Who brings his claims for her to ratify
 —He 's just her puppet for the nonce ! You 'll see,—
 Valence pronounces, as is equitable,

Against him : off goes the confederate :
As equitably, Valence takes her hand !

The Chancellor. You run too fast : her hand, no
subject takes.

Do not our archives hold her father's will ?
That will provides against such accident,
And gives next heir, Prince Berthold, the reversion
Of Juliers, which she forfeits, wedding so.

Gaucelme. I know that, well as you,—but does the
Prince ?

Knows Berthold, think you, that this plan, he helps,
For Valence's ennoblement,—would end,
If crowned with the success which seems its due,
In making him the very thing he plays,
The actual Duke of Juliers ? All agree
That Colombe's title waived or set aside,
He is next heir.

The Chancellor. Incontrovertibly.

Gaucelme. Guibert, your match, now, to the train !

Guibert. Enough !

I'm with you : selfishness is best again.
I thought of turning honest—what a dream !
Let's wake now !

Gaucelme. Selfish, friend, you never were :
'T was but a series of revenges taken
On your unselfishness for prospering ill.

But now that you 're grown wiser, what 's our course ?

Guibert. —Wait, I suppose, till Valence weds our lady,
And then, if we must needs revenge ourselves,
Apprise the Prince.

Gaucelme. —The Prince, ere then dismissed
With thanks for playing his mock part so well ?
Tell the Prince now, sir ! Ay, this very night,
Ere he accepts his dole and goes his way,
Explain how such a marriage makes him Duke,
Then trust his gratitude for the surprise !

Guibert. —Our lady wedding Valence all the same
As if the penalty were undisclosed ?
Good ! If she loves, she 'll not disown her love,
Throw Valence up. I wonder you see that.

Gaucelme. The shame of it—the suddenness and shame !
Within her, the inclining heart—without,
A terrible array of witnesses—
And Valence by, to keep her to her word,
With Berthold's indignation or disgust !
We 'll try it !—Not that we can venture much.
Her confidence we 've lost for ever : Berthold's
Is all to gain.

Guibert. To-night, then, venture we !
Yet—if lost confidence might be renewed ?

Gaucelme. Never in noble natures ! With the base
ones,—

Twist off the crab's claw, wait a smarting-while,
And something grows and grows and gets to be
A mimic of the lost joint, just so like
As keeps in mind it never, never will
Replace its predecessor! Crabs do that:
But lop the lion's foot—and . . .

Guibert. To the Prince!

Gaucelme [aside]. And come what will to the lion's
foot, I pay you,

My cat's-paw, as I long have yearned to pay.

[*Aloud.*] Footsteps! Himself! 'T is Valence breaks
on us,

Exulting that their scheme succeeds. We'll hence—
And perfect ours! Consult the archives, first—
Then, fortified with knowledge, seek the Hall!

Clugnet [to GAUCELME as they retire]. You have not
smiled so since your father died!

As they retire, enter VALENCE with papers.

Valence. So must it be! I have examined these
With scarce a palpitating heart—so calm,
Keeping her image almost wholly off,
Setting upon myself determined watch,
Repelling to the uttermost his claims:
And the result is—all men would pronounce
And not I, only, the result to be—

Berthold is heir ; she has no shade of right
To the distinction which divided us,
But, suffered to rule first, I know not why,
Her rule connived at by those Kings and Popes,
To serve some devil's-purpose,—now 't is gained,
Whate'er it was, the rule expires as well.

—Valence, this rapture . . . selfish can it be ?

Eject it from your heart, her home !—It stays !

Ah, the brave world that opens on us both !

—Do my poor townsmen so esteem it ? Cleves,—

I need not your pale faces ! This, reward

For service done to you ? Too horrible !

I never served you : 't was myself I served—

Nay, served not—rather saved from punishment

Which, had I failed you then, would plague me now.

My life continues yours, and your life, mine.

But if, to take God's gift, I swerve no step—

Cleves ! If I breathe no prayer for it—if she,

[*Footsteps without.*

Colombe, that comes now, freely gives herself—

Will Cleves require, that, turning thus to her,

I . . .

Enter Prince BERTHOLD.

Pardon, sir ! I did not look for you
Till night, i' the Hall ; nor have as yet declared
My judgment to the lady.

Berthold. So I hoped.

Valence. And yet I scarcely know why that should check
The frank disclosure of it first to you—
What her right seems, and what, in consequence,
She will decide on.

Berthold. That I need not ask.

Valence. You need not : I have proved the lady's mind :
And, justice being to do, dare act for her.

Berthold. Doubtless she has a very noble mind.

Valence. Oh, never fear but she 'll in each conjuncture
Bear herself bravely ! She no whit depends
On circumstance ; as she adorns a throne,
She had adorned . . .

Berthold. A cottage—in what book
Have I read that, of every queen that lived ?
A throne ! You have not been instructed, sure,
To forestall my request ?

Valence. 'T is granted, sir !
My heart instructs me. I have scrutinized
Your claims . . .

Berthold. Ah—claims, you mean, at first pre-
ferred ?
I come, before the hour appointed me,
To pray you let those claims at present rest,
In favour of a new and stronger one.

Valence. You shall not need a stronger : on the part

O' the lady, all you offer I accept,
Since one clear right suffices : yours is clear.
Propose !

Berthold. I offer her my hand.

Valence. Your hand ?

Berthold. A Duke's, yourself say ; and, at no far time,
Something here whispers me—an Emperor's.
The lady's mind is noble : which induced
This seizure of occasion ere my claims
Were—settled, let us amicably say !

Valence. Your hand !

Berthold. (He will fall down and kiss it next !)

Sir, this astonishment 's too flattering,
Nor must you hold your mistress' worth so cheap.
Enhance it, rather,—urge that blood is blood—
The daughter of the Burgraves, Landgraves, Markgraves,
Remains their daughter ! I shall scarce gainsay.
Elsewhere or here, the lady needs must rule :
Like the imperial crown's great chrysoprase,
They talk of—somewhat out of keeping there,
And yet no jewel for a meaner cap.

Valence. You wed the Duchess ?

Berthold. Cry you mercy, friend !

Will the match also influence fortunes here ?
A natural solicitude enough.
Be certain, no bad chance it proves for you !

However high you take your present stand,
There's prospect of a higher still remove—
For Juliers will not be my resting-place,
And, when I have to choose a substitute
To rule the little burgh, I'll think of you
Who need not give your mates a character.
And yet I doubt your fitness to supplant
The grey smooth Chamberlain: he'd hesitate
A doubt his lady could demean herself
So low as to accept me. Courage, sir!
I like your method better: feeling's play
Is franker much, and flatters me beside.

Valence. I am to say, you love her?

Berthold.

Say that too!

Love has no great concernment, thinks the world,
With a Duke's marriage. How go precedents
In Juliers' story—how use Juliers' Dukes?
I see you have them here in goodly row;
Yon must be Luitpold—ay, a stalwart sire!
Say, I have been arrested suddenly
In my ambition's course, its rocky course,
By this sweet flower: I fain would gather it
And then proceed: so say and speedily
—(Nor stand there like Duke Luitpold's brazen self!)
Enough, sir: you possess my mind, I think.
This is my claim, the others being withdrawn,

And to this be it that, i' the Hall to-night,
Your lady's answer comes ; till when, farewell !

[*He retires.*]

Valence [*after a pause*]. The heavens and earth stay as
they were ; my heart
Beats as it beat : the truth remains the truth.
What falls away, then, if not faith in her ?
Was it my faith, that she could estimate
Love's value, and, such faith still guiding me,
Dare I now test her ? Or grew faith so strong
Solely because no power of test was mine ?

Enter the DUCHESS.

The Duchess. My fate, sir ! Ah, you turn away. All's
over.

But you are sorry for me ? Be not so !
What I might have become, and never was,
Regret with me ! What I have merely been,
Rejoice I am no longer ! What I seem
Beginning now, in my new state, to be,
Hope that I am !—for, once my rights proved void,
This heavy roof seems easy to exchange
For the blue sky outside—my lot henceforth.

Valence. And what a lot is Berthold's !

The Duchess.

How of him ?

Valence. He gathers earth's whole good into his arms ;

Standing, as man now, stately, strong and wise,
Marching to fortune, not surprised by her.
One great aim, like a guiding-star, above—
Which tasks strength, wisdom, stateliness, to lift
His manhood to the height that takes the prize ;
A prize not near—lest overlooking earth
He rashly spring to seize it—nor remote,
So that he rest upon his path content :
But day by day, while shimmering grows shine,
And the faint circlet prophesies the orb,
He sees so much as, just evolving these,
The stateliness, the wisdom and the strength,
To due completion, will suffice this life,
And lead him at his grandest to the grave.
After this star, out of a night he springs ;
A beggar's cradle for the throne of thrones
He quits ; so, mounting, feels each step he mounts,
Nor, as from each to each exultingly
He passes, overleaps one grade of joy.
This, for his own good :—with the world, each gift
Of God and man,—reality, tradition,
Fancy and fact—so well environ him,
That as a mystic panoply they serve—
Of force, untenanted, to awe mankind,
And work his purpose out with half the world,
While he, their master, dexterously slipt

From such encumbrance, is meantime employed
With his own prowess on the other half.
Thus shall he prosper, every day's success
Adding, to what is he, a solid strength—
An æry might to what encircles him,
Till at the last, so life's routine lends help,
'That as the Emperor only breathes and moves,
His shadow shall be watched, his step or stalk
Become a comfort or a portent, how
He trails his ermine take significance,—
Till even his power shall cease to be most power,
And men shall dread his weakness more, nor dare
Peril their earth its bravest, first and best,
Its typified invincibility.
'Thus shall he go on, greatening, till he ends—
The man of men, the spirit of all flesh,
The fiery centre of an earthly world !

The Duchess. Some such a fortune I had dreamed
should rise

Out of my own—that is, above my power
Seemed other, greater potencies to stretch—

Valence. For you ?

The Duchess. It was not I moved there, I think :
But one I could,—though constantly beside,
And aye approaching,—still keep distant from,
And so adore. 'T was a man moved there.

Valence. Who?

The Duchess. I felt the spirit, never saw the face.

Valence. See it! 'T is Berthold's! He enables you
To realize your vision.

The Duchess. Berthold?

Valence. Duke—

Emperor to be: he proffers you his hand.

The Duchess. Generous and princely!

Valence. He is all of this.

The Duchess. Thanks, Berthold, for my father's sake!
No hand

Degrades me.

Valence. You accept the proffered hand?

The Duchess. That he should love me!

Valence. "Loved" I did not say.

Had that been—love might so incline the Prince
To the world's good, the world that's at his foot,—
I do not know, this moment, I should dare
Desire that you refused the world—and Cleves—
The sacrifice he asks.

The Duchess. Not love me, sir?

Valence. He scarce affirmed it.

The Duchess. May not deeds affirm?

Valence. What does he? . . . Yes, yes, very much he
does!

All the shame saved, he thinks, and sorrow saved—

Immitigable sorrow, so he thinks,—
Sorrow that's deeper than we dream, perchance.

The Duchess. Is not this love?

Valence. So very much he does!

For look, you can descend now gracefully :
All doubts are banished, that the world might have,
Or worst, the doubts yourself, in after-time,
May call up of your heart's sincereness now.
To such, reply, "I could have kept my rule—
"Increased it to the utmost of my dreams—
"Yet I abjured it." This, he does for you :
It is munificently much.

The Duchess. Still "much!"

But why is it not love, sir? Answer me!

Valence. Because not one of Berthold's words and
looks

Had gone with love's presentment of a flower
To the beloved : because bold confidence,
Open superiority, free pride—
Love owns not, yet were all that Berthold owned :
Because where reason, even, finds no flaw,
Unerringly a lover's instinct may.

The Duchess. You reason, then, and doubt?

Valence. I love, and know.

The Duchess. You love? How strange! I never
cast a thought

On that. Just see our selfishness! You seemed
So much my own . . . I had no ground—and yet,
I never dreamed another might divide
My power with you, much less exceed it.

Valence.

Lady,

I am yours wholly

The Duchess. Oh, no, no, not mine!

'T is not the same now, never more can be.

—Your first love, doubtless. Well, what's gone from
me?

What have I lost in you?

Valence.

My heart replies—

No loss there! So, to Berthold back again:

This offer of his hand, he bids me make—

Its obvious magnitude is well to weigh.

The Duchess. She's . . . yes, she must be very fair
for you!

Valence. I am a simple advocate of Cleves.

The Duchess. You! With the heart and brain that so
helped me,

I fancied them exclusively my own,

Yet find are subject to a stronger sway

She must be . . . tell me, is she very fair?

Valence. Most fair, beyond conception or belief.

The Duchess. Black eyes?—no matter! Colombe, the
world leads

Its life without you, whom your friends professed
The only woman : see how true they spoke !
One lived this while, who never saw your face,
Nor heard your voice—unless . . . Is she from Cleves ?

Valence. Cleves knows her well.

The Duchess. Ah—just a fancy, now !
When you poured forth the wrongs of Cleves,—I said,
—Thought, that is, afterward . . .

Valence. You thought of me ?

The Duchess. Of whom else ? Only such great cause,
I thought,
For such effect : see what true love can do !
Cleves is his love. I almost fear to ask
. . . And will not. This is idling : to our work !
Admit before the Prince, without reserve,
My claims misgrounded ; then may follow better
. . . When you poured out Cleves' wrongs impetuously,
Was she in your mind ?

Valence. All done was done for her
—To humble me !

The Duchess. She will be proud at least.

Valence. She ?

The Duchess. When you tell her.

Valence. That will never be.

The Duchess. How—are there sweeter things you hope
to tell ?

No, sir! You counselled me,—I counsel you
 In the one point I—any woman—can.
 Your worth, the first thing; let her own come next—
 Say what you did through her, and she through you—
 The praises of her beauty afterward!
 Will you?

Valence. I dare not.

The Duchess. Dare not?

Valence. She I love

Suspects not such a love in me.

The Duchess. You jest.

Valence. The lady is above me and away.
 Not only the brave form, and the bright mind,
 And the great heart, combine to press me low—
 But all the world calls rank divides us.

The Duchess. Rank!

Now grant me patience! Here's a man declares
 Oracularly in another's case—

Sees the true value and the false, for them—

Nay, bids them see it, and they straight do see.

You called my court's love worthless—so it turned:

I threw away as dross my heap of wealth,

And here you stickle for a piece or two!

First—has she seen you?

Valence. Yes.

The Duchess. She loves you, then.

Valence. One flash of hope burst ; then succeeded
night :

And all 's at darkest now. Impossible !

The Duchess. We 'll try : you are—so to speak—my
subject yet ?

Valence. As ever—to the death.

The Duchess. Obey me, then !

Valence. I must.

The Duchess. Approach her, and . . . no ! first of all
Get more assurance. “My instructress,” say,
“Was great, descended from a line of kings,
“And even fair”—(wait why I say this folly)—
“She said, of all men, none for eloquence,
“Courage, and (what cast even these to shade)
“The heart they sprung from,—none deserved like him
“Who saved her at her need : if she said this,
“What should not one I love, say ? ”

Valence. Heaven—this hope—
Oh, lady, you are filling me with fire !

The Duchess. Say this !—nor think I bid you cast
aside

One touch of all the awe and reverence ;
Nay, make her proud for once to heart's content
That all this wealth of heart and soul 's her own !
Think you are all of this,—and, thinking it,
. . . (Obey !)

Valence. I cannot choose.

The Duchess. Then, kneel to her!

[*VALENCE sinks on his knee.*]

I dream!

Valence. Have mercy! Yours, unto the death,—
I have obeyed. Despise, and let me die!

The Duchess. Alas, sir, is it to be ever thus?
Even with you as with the world? I know
This morning's service was no vulgar deed
Whose motive, once it dares avow itself,
Explains all done and infinitely more,
So, takes the shelter of a nobler cause.

Your service named its true source,—loyalty!
The rest 's unsaid again. The Duchess bids you,
Rise, sir! The Prince's words were in debate.

Valence [*rising*]. Rise? Truth, as ever, lady, comes
from you!

I should rise—I who spoke for Cleves, can speak
For Man—yet tremble now, who stood firm then.
I laughed—for 't was past tears—that Cleves should
starve

With all hearts beating loud the infamy,
And no tongue daring trust as much to air:
Yet here, where all hearts speak, shall I be mute?
Oh, lady, for your own sake look on me!
On all I am, and have, and do—heart, brain,

Body and soul,—this Valence and his gifts !
I was proud once : I saw you, and they sank,
So that each, magnified a thousand times,
Were nothing to you—but such nothingness,
Would a crown gild it, or a sceptre prop,
A treasure speed, a laurel-wreath enhance ?
What is my own desert ? But should your love
Have . . . there 's no language helps here . . . singled
me,—

Then—oh, that wild word “then !”—be just to love,
In generosity its attribute !
Love, since you pleased to love ! All 's cleared—a stage
For trial of the question kept so long :
Judge you—Is love or vanity the best ?
You, solve it for the world's sake—you, speak first
What all will shout one day—you, vindicate
Our earth and be its angel ! All is said.
Lady, I offer nothing—I am yours :
But, for the cause' sake, look on me and him,
And speak !

The Duchess. I have received the Prince's message :
Say, I prepare my answer !

Valence. Take me, Cleves !

[*He withdraws.*]

The Duchess. Mournful—that nothing 's what it calls
itself !

Devotion, zeal, faith, loyalty—mere love !
And, love in question, what may Berthold's be ?
I did ill to mistrust the world so soon :
Already was this Berthold at my side.
The valley-level has its hawks no doubt :
May not the rock-top have its eagles, too ?
Yet Valence . . . let me see his rival then !

ACT V.

NIGHT.

SCENE.—*The Hall.**Enter BERTHOLD and MELCHIOR.**Melchior.* And here you wait the matter's issue?*Berthold.* Here.*Melchior.* I don't regret I shut Amelius, then.
But tell me, on this grand disclosure,—how
Behaved our spokesman with the forehead?*Berthold.* Oh,
Turned out no better than the foreheadless—
Was dazzled not so very soon, that 's all!
For my part, this is scarce the hasty showy
Chivalrous measure you give me credit of.
Perhaps I had a fancy,—but 't is gone.
—Let her commence the unfriended innocent
And carry wrongs about from court to court?
No, truly! The least shake of fortune's sand,
—My uncle-Pope chokes in a coughing fit,
King-cousin takes a fancy to blue eyes,—

And wondrously her claims would brighten up ;
Forth comes a new gloss on the ancient law,
O'er-looked provisoes, o'er-past premises,
Follow in plenty. No : 't is the safe step.
The hour beneath the convent-wall is lost :
Juliers and she, once mine, are ever mine.

Melchior. Which is to say, you, losing heart already,
Elude the adventure.

Berthold. Not so—or, if so—
Why not confess at once that I advise
None of our kingly craft and guild just now
To lay, one moment, down their privilege
With the notion they can any time at pleasure
Retake it : that may turn out hazardous.
We seem, in Europe, pretty well at end
O' the night, with our great masque : those favoured few
Who keep the chamber's top, and honour's chance
Of the early evening, may retain their place
And figure as they list till out of breath.
But it is growing late : and I observe
A dim grim kind of tipstaves at the doorway
Not only bar new-comers entering now,
But caution those who left, for any cause,
And would return, that morning draws too near ;
The ball must die off, shut itself up. We—
I think, may dance lights out and sunshine in,

And sleep off headache on our frippery :
But friend the other, who cunningly stole out,
And, after breathing the fresh air outside,
Means to re-enter with a new costume,
Will be advised go back to bed, I fear.
I stick to privilege, on second thoughts.

Melchior. Yes—you evade the adventure : and, beside,
Give yourself out for colder than you are.
King Philip, only, notes the lady's eyes ?
Don't they come in for somewhat of the motive
With you too ?

Berthold. Yes—no : I am past that now.
Gone 't is : I cannot shut my soul to fact.
Of course, I might by forethought and contrivance
Reason myself into a rapture. Gone :
And something better come instead, no doubt.

Melchior. So be it ! Yet, all the same, proceed my way,
Though to your ends ; so shall you prosper best !
The lady,—to be won for selfish ends,—
Will be won easier my unselfish . . . call it,
Romantic way.

Berthold. Won easier ?

Melchior. Will not she ?

Berthold. There I profess humility without bound :
Ill cannot speed—not I—the Emperor.

Melchior. And I should think the Emperor best waived,

From your description of her mood and way.
You could look, if it pleased you, into hearts ;
But are too indolent and fond of watching
Your own—you know that, for you study it.

Berthold. Had you but seen the orator her friend,
So bold and voluble an hour before,
Abashed to earth at aspect of the change !
Make her an Empress ? Ah, that changed the case !
Oh, I read hearts ! 'T is for my own behoof,
I court her with my true worth : wait the event !
I learned my final lesson on that head
When years ago,—my first and last essay—
Before the priest my uncle could by help
Of his superior, raise me from the dirt—
Priscilla left me for a Brabant lord
Whose cheek was like the topaz on his thumb.
I am past illusion on that score.

Melchior. Here comes
The lady—

Berthold. —And there you go. But do not ! Give me
Another chance to please you ! Hear me plead !

Melchior. You 'll keep, then, to the lover, to the man ?

*Enter the DUCHESS—followed by ADOLF and SABYNE
and, after an interval, by the Courtiers.*

Berthold. Good auspice to our meeting !

The Duchess. May it prove!

—And you, sir, will be Emperor one day?

Berthold. (Ay, that's the point!) I may be Emperor.

The Duchess. 'T is not for my sake only, I am proud
Of this you offer: I am prouder far
That from the highest state should duly spring
The highest, since most generous, of deeds.

Berthold. (Generous—still that!) You underrate
yourself.

You are, what I, to be complete, must gain—
Find now, and may not find, another time.
While I career on all the world for stage,
There needs at home my representative.

The Duchess. —Such, rather, would some warrior-
woman be—
One dowered with lands and gold, or rich in friends—
One like yourself.

Berthold. Lady, I am myself,
And have all these: I want what's not myself,
Nor has all these. Why give one hand two swords?
Here's one already: be a friend's next gift
A silk glove, if you will—I have a sword.

The Duchess. You love me, then?

Berthold. Your lineage I
revere,
Honour your virtue, in your truth believe,

Do homage to your intellect, and bow
Before your peerless beauty.

The Duchess. But, for love—

Berthold. A further love I do not understand.

Our best course is to say these hideous truths,
And see them, once said, grow endurable :
Like waters shuddering from their central bed,
Black with the midnight bowels of the earth,
That, once up-spouted by an earthquake's throe,
A portent and a terror—soon subside,
Freshen apace, take gold and rainbow hues
In sunshine, sleep in shadow, and at last
Grow common to the earth as hills or trees—
Accepted by all things they came to scare.

The Duchess. You cannot love, then ?

Berthold. —Charlemagne, perhaps !

Are you not over-curious in love-lore ?

The Duchess. I have become so, very recently.

It seems, then, I shall best deserve esteem,
Respect, and all your candour promises,
By putting on a calculating mood—
Asking the terms of my becoming yours ?

Berthold. Let me not do myself injustice, neither.

Because I will not condescend to fictions
That promise what my soul can ne'er acquit,
It does not follow that my guarded phrase

May not include far more of what you seek,
Than wide profession of less scrupulous men.
You will be Empress, once for all : with me
The Pope disputes supremacy—you stand,
And none gainsays, the earth's first woman.

The Duchess.

That—

Or simple Lady of Ravestein again ?

Berthold. The matter 's not in my arbitrament :
Now I have made my claims—which I regret—
Cede one, cede all.

The Duchess. This claim then, you enforce ?

Berthold. The world looks on.

The Duchess. And when must I decide ?

Berthold. When, lady ? Have I said thus much so
promptly

For nothing ?—Poured out, with such pains, at once
What I might else have suffered to ooze forth
Droplet by droplet in a lifetime long—
For aught less than as prompt an answer, too ?
All 's fairly told now : who can teach you more ?

The Duchess. I do not see him.

Berthold. I shall ne'er deceive.

This offer should be made befittingly
Did time allow the better setting forth
The good of it, with what is not so good,
Advantage, and disparagement as well :

But as it is, the sum of both must serve.
I am already weary of this place ;
My thoughts are next stage on to Rome. Decide !
The Empire—or,—not even Juliers now !
Hail to the Empress—farewell to the Duchess !

[*The Courtiers, who have been drawing nearer and nearer, interpose.*

Gaucelme. —“Farewell,” Prince? when we break in
at our risk—

Clugnet. Almost upon court-licence trespassing—

Gaucelme. —To point out how your claims are valid yet !
You know not, by the Duke her father's will,
The lady, if she weds beneath her rank,
Forfeits her Duchy in the next heir's favour—
So 't is expressly stipulate. And if
It can be shown 't is her intent to wed
A subject, then yourself, next heir, by right
Succeed to Juliers.

Berthold. What insanity?—

Guibert. Sir, there 's one Valence, the pale fiery man
You saw and heard this morning—thought, no doubt,
Was of considerable standing here :
I put it to your penetration, Prince,
If aught save love, the truest love for her
Could make him serve the lady as he did !
He 's simply a poor advocate of Cleves

—Creeps here with difficulty, finds a place
With danger, gets in by a miracle,
And for the first time meets the lady's face—
So runs the story : is that credible ?
For, first—no sooner in, than he 's apprised
Fortunes have changed ; you are all-powerful here,
The lady as powerless : he stands fast by her !

The Duchess [*aside*]. And do such deeds spring up
from love alone ?

Guibert. But here occurs the question, does the lady
Love him again ? I say, how else can she ?
Can she forget how he stood singly forth
In her defence, dared outrage all of us,
Insult yourself—for what, save love's reward ?

The Duchess [*aside*]. And is love then the sole reward
of love ?

Guibert. But, love him as she may and must—you ask,
Means she to wed him ? “Yes,” both natures answer !
Both, in their pride, point out the sole result ;
Nought less would he accept nor she propose.
For each conjecture was she great enough
—Will be, for this.

Clugnet. Though, now that this is known,
Policy, doubtless, urges she deny . . .

The Duchess. —What, sir, and wherefore ?—since I
am not sure

That all is any other than you say !
You take this Valence, hold him close to me,
Him with his actions : can I choose but look ?
I am not sure, love trulier shows itself
Than in this man, you hate and would degrade,
Yet, with your worst abatement, show me thus.
Nor am I—(thus made look within myself,
Ere I had dared)—now that the look is dared—
Sure that I do not love him !

Guibert. Hear you, Prince ?

Berthold. And what, sirs, please you, may this prattle
mean

Unless to prove with what alacrity
You give your lady's secrets to the world ?
How much indebted, for discovering
That quality, you make me, will be found
When there 's a keeper for my own to seek.

Courtiers. "Our lady ?"

Berthold. —She assuredly remains.

The Duchess. Ah, Prince—and you too can be
generous ?

You could renounce your power, if this were so,
And let me, as these phrase it, wed my love
Yet keep my Duchy ? You perhaps exceed
Him, even, in disinterestedness !

Berthold. How, lady, should all this affect my purpose ?

Your will and choice are still as ever, free.
Say, you have known a worthier than myself
In mind and heart, of happier form and face—
Others must have their birthright : I have gifts.
To balance theirs, not blot them out of sight.
Against a hundred alien qualities,
I lay the prize I offer. I am nothing :
Wed you the Empire ?

The Duchess. And my heart away ?

Berthold. When have I made pretension to your
heart ?

I give none. I shall keep your honour safe ;
With mine I trust you, as the sculptor trusts
Yon marble woman with the marble rose,
Loose on her hand, she never will let fall,
In graceful, slight, silent security.
You will be proud of my world-wide career,
And I content in you the fair and good.
What were the use of planting a few seeds
The thankless climate never would mature—
Affections all repelled by circumstance ?
Enough : to these no credit I attach,—
To what you own, find nothing to object.
Write simply on my requisition's face
What shall content my friends—that you admit,
As Colombe of Ravestein, the claims therein,

Or never need admit them, as my wife—
And either way, all 's ended !

The Duchess. Let all end !

Berthold. The requisition !

Guibert. —Valence holds, of course !

Berthold. Desire his presence ! [ADOLF goes out.]

Courtiers [to each other]. Out it all comes yet ;

He 'll have his word against the bargain yet ;

He 's not the man to tamely acquiesce.

One passionate appeal—upbraiding even,

May turn the tide again. Despair not yet !

[*They retire a little.*]

Berthold [to MELCHIOR]. The Empire has its old
success, my friend !

Melchior. You 've had your way : before the spokes-
man speaks,

Let me, but this once, work a problem out,

And ever more be dumb ! The Empire wins ?

To better purpose have I read my books !

Enter VALENCE.

Melchior [to the Courtiers]. Apart, my masters !

[*To VALENCE.*] Sir, one word with you !

I am a poor dependant of the Prince's—

Pitched on to speak, as of slight consequence.

You are no higher, I find : in other words,

We two, as probably the wisest here,
 Need not hold diplomatic talk like fools.
 Suppose I speak, divesting the plain fact
 Of all their tortuous phrases, fit for them?
 Do you reply so, and what trouble saved!
 The Prince, then—an embroiled strange heap of news
 This moment reaches him—if true or false,
 All dignity forbids he should inquire
 In person, or by worthier deputy;
 Yet somehow must inquire, lest slander come:
 And so, 't is I am pitched on. You have heard
 His offer to your lady?

Valence. Yes.

Melchior. —Conceive
 Her joy thereat?

Valence. I cannot.

Melchior. No one can.

All draws to a conclusion, therefore.

Valence [*aside*]. So!

No after-judgment—no first thought revised—
 Her first and last decision!—me, she leaves,
 Takes him; a simple heart is flung aside,
 The ermine o'er a heartless breast embraced.
 Oh Heaven, this mockery has been played too oft!
 Once, to surprise the angels—twice, that fiends
 Recording, might be proud they chose not so—

Thrice, many thousand times, to teach the world
 All men should pause, misdoubt their strength, since men
 Can have such chance yet fail so signally,
 —But ever, ever this farewell to Heaven,
 Welcome to earth—this taking death for life—
 This spurning love and kneeling to the world—
 Oh Heaven, it is too often and too old!

Melchior. Well, on this point, what but an absurd
 rumour

Arises—these, its source—its subject, you!
 Your faith and loyalty misconstruing,
 They say, your service claims the lady's hand!
 Of course, nor Prince nor lady can respond:
 Yet something must be said: for, were it true
 You made such claim, the Prince would . . .

Valence. Well, sir,—would?

Melchior. —Not only probably withdraw his suit,
 But, very like, the lady might be forced
 Accept your own. Oh, there are reasons why!
 But you'll excuse at present all save one,—
 I think so. What we want is, your own witness,
 For, or against—her good, or yours: decide!

Valence [*aside*]. Be it her good if she accounts it so!
 [*After a contest.*] For what am I but hers, to choose as she?
 Who knows how far, beside, the light from her
 May reach, and dwell with, what she looks upon?

Melchior [*to the Prince*]. Now to him, you!

Berthold [*to VALENCE*]. My friend acquaints you, sir,
The noise runs . . .

Valence. —Prince, how fortunate are you,
Wedding her as you will, in spite of noise,
To show belief in love! Let her but love you,
All else you disregard! What else can be?
You know how love is incompatible
With falsehood—purifies, assimilates
All other passions to itself.

Melchior. Ay, sir:
But softly! Where, in the object we select,
Such love is, perchance, wanting?

Valence. Then indeed,
What is it you can take?

Melchior. Nay, ask the world!
Youth, beauty, virtue, an illustrious name,
An influence o'er mankind.

Valence. When man perceives . . .
—Ah, I can only speak as for myself!

The Duchess. Speak for yourself!

Valence. May I?—no, I have spoken,
And time's gone by. Had I seen such an one,
As I loved her—weighing thoroughly that word—
So should my task be to evolve her love:
If for myself!—if for another—well.

Berthold. Heroic truly! And your sole reward,—
The secret pride in yielding up love's right?

Valence. Who thought upon reward? And yet how much
Comes after—oh, what amplest recompense!
Is the knowledge of her, nought? the memory, nought?
—Lady, should such an one have looked on you,
Ne'er wrong yourself so far as quote the world
And say, love can go unrequited here!
You will have blessed him to his whole life's end—
Low passions hindered, baser cares kept back,
All goodness cherished where you dwelt—and dwell.
What would he have? He holds you—you, both form
And mind, in his,—where self-love makes such room
For love of you, he would not serve you now
The vulgar way,—repulse your enemies,
Win you new realms, or best, to save the old
Die blissfully—that's past so long ago!
He wishes you no need, thought, care of him—
Your good, by any means, himself unseen,
Away, forgotten!—He gives that life's task up,
As it were . . . but this charge which I return—

[*Offers the requisition, which she takes.*

Wishing your good.

The Duchess [*having subscribed it*]. And opportunely,
sir—
Since at a birthday's close, like this of mine,

Good wishes gentle deeds reciprocate.
Most on a wedding-day, as mine is too,
Should gifts be thought of: yours comes first by right.
Ask of me!

Berthold. He shall have whate'er he asks,
For your sake and his own.

Valence [*aside*]. If I should ask—
The withered bunch of flowers she wears—perhaps,
One last touch of her hand, I never more
Shall see!

[*After a pause, presenting his paper to the Prince.*

Cleves' Prince, redress the wrongs of Cleves!

Berthold. I will, sir!

The Duchess [*as VALENCE prepares to retire*]. —Nay,
do out your duty, first!

You bore this paper; I have registered
My answer to it: read it and have done!

[*VALENCE reads it*

I take him—give up Juliers and the world.

This is my Birthday.

Melchior. Berthold, my one hero
Of the world she gives up, one friend worth my books,
Sole man I think it pays the pains to watch,—
Speak, for I know you through your Popes and Kings!

Berthold [*after a pause*]. Lady, well rewarded! Sir,
as well deserved!

I could not imitate—I hardly envy—
I do admire you. All is for the best.
Too costly a flower were this, I see it now,
To pluck and set upon my barren helm
To wither—any garish plume will do.
I'll not insult you and refuse your Duchy—
You can so well afford to yield it me,
And I were left, without it, sadly lorn.
As it is—for me—if that will flatter you,
A somewhat wearier life seems to remain
Than I thought possible where . . . 'faith, their life
Begins already! They're too occupied
To listen: and few words content me best.
[*Abruptly to the Courtiers.*] I am your Duke, though!

Who obey me here?

The Duchess. Adolf and Sabyne follow us—

Guibert [*starting from the Courtiers*]. —And I?

Do I not follow them, if I may n't you?
Shall not I get some little duties up
At Ravestein and emulate the rest?
God save you, Gaucelme! 'T is my Birthday, too!

Berthold. You happy handful that remain with me
. . . That is, with Dietrich the black Barnabite
I shall leave over you—will earn your wages
Or Dietrich has forgot to ply his trade!
Meantime,—go copy me the precedents

Of every installation, proper styles
And pedigrees of all your Juliers' Dukes—
While I prepare to plod on my old way,
And somewhat wearily, I must confess!

*The Duchess [with a light joyous laugh as she turns
from them].* Come, Valence, to our friends, God's
earth . . .

Valence [as she falls into his arms]. —And thee!

MEN AND WOMEN.

MEN AND WOMEN.

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*“TRANSCENDENTALISM: A POEM IN
TWELVE BOOKS.”*

STOP playing, poet! May a brother speak?
'T is you speak, that's your error. Song's our art:
Whereas you please to speak these naked thoughts
Instead of draping them in sights and sounds.
—True thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts fit to
treasure up!

But why such long prolusion and display,
Such turning and adjustment of the harp,
And taking it upon your breast, at length,
Only to speak dry words across its strings?
Stark-naked thought is in request enough:
Speak prose and hollo it till Europe hears!
The six-foot Swiss tube, braced about with bark,
Which helps the hunter's voice from Alp to Alp—
Exchange our harp for that,—who hinders you?

But here 's your fault ; grown men want thought, you
think ;
Thought 's what they mean by verse, and seek in verse
Boys seek for images and melody,
Men must have reason—so, you aim at men.
Quite otherwise ! Objects throng our youth, 't is true ;
We see and hear and do not wonder much :
If you could tell us what they mean, indeed !
As Gernian Boehme never cared for plants
Until it happed, a-walking in the fields,
He noticed all at once that plants could speak,
Nay, turned with loosened tongue to talk with him.
That day the daisy had an eye indeed—
Colloquized with the cowslip on such themes !
We find them extant yet in Jacob's prose.
But by the time youth slips a stage or two
While reading prose in that tough book he wrote
(Collating and emendating the same
And settling on the sense most to our mind),
We shut the clasps and find life's summer past.
Then, who helps more, pray, to repair our loss—
Another Boehme with a tougher book
And subtler meanings of what roses say,—
Or some stout Mage like him of Halberstadt,
John, who made things Boehme wrote thoughts about ?
He with a "look you !" vents a brace of rhymes,

And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
Over us, under, round us every side,
Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs
And musty volumes, Boehme's book and all,—
Buries us with a glory, young once more,
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.

So come, the harp back to your heart again !
You are a poem, though your poem 's naught.
The best of all you showed before, believe,
Was your own boy-face o'er the finer chords
Bent, following the cherub at the top
That points to God with his paired half-moon wings.

HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORAR

I ONLY knew one poet in my life :
And this, or something like it, was his way.

You saw go up and down Valladolid,
A man of mark, to know next time you saw.
His very serviceable suit of black
Was courtly once and conscientious still,
And many might have worn it, though none did :
The cloak, that somewhat shone and showed the thr
Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.
He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane,
Scenting the world, looking it full in face,
An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.
They turned up, now, the alley by the church,
That leads nowhither ; now, they breathed themsel
On the main promenade just at the wrong time :
You 'd come upon his scrutinizing hat,
Making a peaked shade blacker than itself
Against the single window spared some house

Intact yet with its mouldered Moorish work,—
Or else surprise the ferrel of his stick
'T'rying the mortar's temper 'tween the chinks
Of some new shop a-building, French and fine.
He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,
The man who slices lemons into drink,
The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys
That volunteer to help him turn its winch.
He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,
And fly-leaf ballads on the vendor's string,
And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.
He took such cognizance of men and things,
If any beat a horse, you felt he saw ;
If any cursed a woman, he took note ;
Yet stared at nobody,—you stared at him,
And found, less to your pleasure than surprise,
He seemed to know you and expect as much.
So, next time that a neighbour's tongue was loosed,
It marked the shameful and notorious fact,
We had among us, not so much a spy,
As a recording chief-inquisitor,
The town's true master if the town but knew !
We merely kept a governor for form,
While this man walked about and took account
Of all thought, said and acted, then went home,
And wrote it fully to our Lord the King

Who has an itch to know things, he knows why,
And reads them in his bedroom of a night.
Oh, you might smile! there wanted not a touch,
A tang of . . . well, it was not wholly ease
As back into your mind the man's look came.
Stricken in years a little,—such a brow
His eyes had to live under!—clear as flint
On either side the formidable nose
Curved, cut and coloured like an eagle's claw.
Had he to do with A.'s surprising fate?
When altogether old B. disappeared
And young C. got his mistress,—was 't our friend,
His letter to the King, that did it all?
What paid the bloodless man for so much pains?
Our Lord the King has favourites manifold,
And shifts his ministry some once a month;
Our city gets new governors at whiles,—
But never word or sign, that I could hear,
Notified to this man about the streets
The King's approval of those letters conned
The last thing duly at the dead of night.
Did the man love his office? Frowned our Lord,
Exhorting when none heard—"Beseech me not!
"Too far above my people,—beneath me!
"I set the watch,—how should the people know?
"Forget them, keep me all the more in mind!"

Was some such understanding 'twixt the two?

I found no truth in one report at least—
That if you tracked him to his home, down lanes
Beyond the Jewry, and as clean to pace,
You found he ate his supper in a room
Blazing with lights, four Titians on the wall,
And twenty naked girls to change his plate !
Poor man, he lived another kind of life
In that new stuccoed third house by the bridge,
Fresh-painted, rather smart than otherwise !
The whole street might o'erlook him as he sat,
Leg crossing leg, one foot on the dog's back,
Playing a decent cribbage with his maid
(Jacynth, you 're sure her name was) o'er the cheese
And fruit, three red halves of starved winter-pears,
Or treat of radishes in April. Nine,
Ten, struck the church clock, straight to bed went he.

My father, like the man of sense he was,
Would point him out to me a dozen times ;
" 'St—'St," he 'd whisper, " the Corregidor ! "
I had been used to think that personage
Was one with lacquered breeches, lustrous belt,
And feathers like a forest in his hat,
Who blew a trumpet and proclaimed the news,

Announced the bull-fights, gave each church its turn,
And memorized the miracle in vogue !
He had a great observance from us boys ;
We were in error ; that was not the man.

I 'd like now, yet had haply been afraid,
To have just looked, when this man came to die,
And seen who lined the clean gay garret-sides
And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,
With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.
Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,
Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and death,
Doing the King's work all the dim day long,
In his old coat and up to knees in mud,
Smoked like a herring, dining on a crust,—
And, now the day was won, relieved at once !
No further show or need for that old coat,
You are sure, for one thing ! Bless us, all the while
How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I !
A second, and the angels alter that.
Well, I could never write a verse,—could you ?
Let 's to the Prado and make the most of time.

ARTEMIS PROLOGIZES.

I AM a goddess of the ambrosial courts,
 And save by Here, Queen of Pride, surpassed
 By none whose temples whiten this the world.
 Through heaven I roll my lucid moon along ;
 I shed in hell o'er my pale people peace ;
 On earth I, caring for the creatures, guard
 Each pregnant yellow wolf and fox-bitch sleek,
 And every feathered mother's callow brood,
 And all that love green haunts and loneliness.
 Of men, the chaste adore me, hanging crowns
 Of poppies red to blackness, bell and stem,
 Upon my image at Athenai here ;
 And this dead Youth, Asclepios bends above,
 Was dearest to me. He, my buskined step
 To follow through the wild-wood leafy ways,
 And chase the panting stag, or swift with darts
 Stop the swift ounce, or lay the leopard low,
 Neglected homage to another god :
 Whence Aphrodite, by no midnight smoke

Of tapers lulled, in jealousy despatched
A noisome lust that, as the gadbee stings,
Possessed his stepdame Phaidra for himself
The son of Theseus her great absent spouse.
Hippolutos exclaiming in his rage
Against the fury of the Queen, she judged
Life insupportable ; and, pricked at heart
An Amazonian stranger's race should dare
To scorn her, perished by the murderous cord :
Yet, ere she perished, blasted in a scroll
The fame of him her swerving made not swerve.
And Theseus, read, returning, and believed,
And exiled, in the blindness of his wrath,
The man without a crime who, last as first,
Loyal, divulged not to his sire the truth.
Now Theseus from Poseidon had obtained
That of his wishes should be granted three,
And one he imprecated straight—" Alive
" May ne'er Hippolutos reach other lands !"
Poseidon heard, ai ai ! And scarce the prince
Had stepped into the fixed boots of the car
That give the feet a stay against the strength
Of the Henetian horses, and around
His body flung the rein, and urged their speed
Along the rocks and shingles of the shore,
When from the gaping wave a monster flung

His obscene body in the coursers' path.
These, mad with terror, as the sea-bull sprawled
Wallowing about their feet, lost care of him
That reared them ; and the master-chariot-pole
Snapping beneath their plunges like a reed,
Hippolutos, whose feet were trammelled fast,
Was yet dragged forward by the circling rein
Which either hand directed ; nor they quenched
The frenzy of their flight before each trace,
Wheel-spoke and splinter of the woeful car,
Each boulder-stone, sharp stub and spiny shell,
Huge fish-bone wrecked and wreathed amid the sands
On that detested beach, was bright with blood
And morsels of his flesh : then fell the steeds
Head-foremost, crashing in their mooned fronts,
Shivering with sweat, each white eye horror-fixed.
His people, who had witnessed all afar,
Bore back the ruins of Hippolutos.
But when his sire, too swoln with pride, rejoiced
(Indomitable as a man foredoomed)
That vast Poseidon had fulfilled his prayer,
I, in a flood of glory visible,
Stood o'er my dying votary and, deed
By deed, revealed, as all took place, the truth.
Then Theseus lay the woefullest of men,
And worthily ; but ere the death-veils hid

His face, the murdered prince full pardon breathed
To his rash sire. Whereat Athenai wails.

So I, who ne'er forsake my votaries,
Lest in the cross-way none the honey-cake
Should tender, nor pour out the dog's hot life ;
Lest at my fane the priests disconsolate
Should dress my image with some faded poor
Few crowns, made favours of, nor dare object
Such slackness to my worshippers who turn
Elsewhere the trusting heart and loaded hand,
As they had climbed Olumpos to report
Of Artemis and nowhere found her throne—
I interposed : and, this eventful night,—
(While round the funeral pyre the populace
Stood with fierce light on their black robes which bound
Each sobbing head, while yet their hair they clipped
O'er the dead body of their withered prince,
And, in his palace, Theseus prostrated
On the cold hearth, his brow cold as the slab
'T was bruised on, groaned away the heavy grief—
As the pyre fell, and down the cross logs crashed
Sending a crowd of sparkles through the night,
And the gay fire, elate with mastery,
Towered like a serpent o'er the clotted jars
Of wine, dissolving oils and frankincense,

And splendid gums like gold),—my potency
Conveyed the perished man to my retreat
In the thrice-venerable forest here.
And this white-bearded sage who squeezes now
The berried plant, is Phoibos' son of fame,
Asclepios, whom my radiant brother taught
The doctrine of each herb and flower and root,
To know their secret'st virtue and express
The saving soul of all : who so has soothed
With lavers the torn brow and murdered cheeks,
Composed the hair and brought its gloss again,
And called the red bloom to the pale skin back,
And laid the strips and jagged ends of flesh
Even once more, and slacked the sinew's knot
Of every tortured limb—that now he lies
As if mere sleep possessed him underneath
These interwoven oaks and pines. Oh cheer,
Divine presenter of the healing rod,
Thy snake, with ardent throat and lulling eye,
Twines his lithe spires around ! I say, much cheer !
Proceed thou with thy wisest pharmacies !
And ye, white crowd of woodland sister-nymphs,
Ply, as the sage directs, these buds and leaves
That strew the turf around the twain ! While I
Await, in fitting silence, the event.

AN EPISTLE

CONTAINING THE
STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF KARSHISH,
THE ARAB PHYSICIAN.

KARSHISH, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
The not-incurious in God's handiwork
(This man's-flesh he hath admirably made,
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
To coop up and keep down on earth a space
That puff of vapour from his mouth, man's soul)
—To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,
Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip
Back and rejoin its source before the term,—
And aptest in contrivance (under God)
To baffle it by deftly stopping such :—
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with peace)

Three samples of true snakestone—rarer still,
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,
(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)
And writeth now the twenty-second time.

My journeyings were brought to Jericho :
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art
Shall count a little labour unrepaid?
I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone
On many a flinty furlong of this land.
Also, the country-side is all on fire
With rumours of a marching hitherward :
Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.
A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear ;
Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls :
I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.
Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,
And once a town declared me for a spy ;
But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,
Since this poor covert where I pass the night,
This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence
A man with plague-sores at the third degree
Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here !
'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,
To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip
And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.

A viscid choler is observable
In tertians, I was nearly bold to say ;
And falling-sickness hath a happier cure
Than our school wots of : there 's a spider here
Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,
Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back ;
Take five and drop them . . but who knows his mind,
The Syrian runagate I trust this to ?
His service payeth me a sublimate
Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.
Best wait : I reach Jerusalem at morn,
There set in order my experiences,
Gather what most deserves, and give thee all—
Or I might add, Judæa's gum-tragacanth
Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,
Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,
In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease
Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy—
Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar—
But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay : my Syrian blinketh gratefully,
Protesteth his devotion is my price—
Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal ?
I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
What set me off a-writing first of all.

An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang!
For, be it this town's barrenness—or else
The Man had something in the look of him—
His case has struck me far more than 't is worth.
So, pardon if—(lest presently I lose
In the great press of novelty at hand
The care and pains this somehow stole from me)
I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,
Almost in sight—for, wilt thou have the truth?
The very man is gone from me but now,
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.
Thus then, and let thy better wit help all!

'T is but a case of mania—subinduced
By epilepsy, at the turning-point
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days:
When, by the exhibition of some drug
Or spell, exorcization, stroke of art
Unknown to me and which 't were well to know
The evil thing out-breaking all at once
Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,—
But, flinging (so to speak) life's gates too wide
Making a clear house of it too suddenly,
The first conceit that entered might inscribe
Whatever it was minded on the wall
So plainly at that vantage, as it were

(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent
Attaineth to erase those fancy-scrawls
The just-returned and new-established soul
Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart
That henceforth she will read or these or none.
And first—the man's own firm conviction rests
That he was dead (in fact they buried him)
—That he was dead and then restored to life
By a Nazarene physician of his tribe :
—'Sayeth, the same bade " Rise," and he did rise.
" Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.
Not so this figment !—not, that such a fume,
Instead of giving way to time and health,
Should eat itself into the life of life,
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all !
For see, how he takes up the after-life.
The man—it is one Lazarus a Jew,
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,
The body's habit wholly laudable,
As much, indeed, beyond the common health
As he were made and put aside to show.
Think, could we penetrate by any drug
And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,
And bring it clear and fair, by three days' sleep !
Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?
This grown man eyes the world now like a child.

Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,
Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,
To bear my inquisition. While they spoke,
Now sharply, now with sorrow,—told the case,—
He listened not except I spoke to him,
But folded his two hands and let them talk,
Watching the flies that buzzed : and yet no fool.
And that 's a sample how his years must go.
Look, if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,
Should find a treasure,—can he use the same
With straitened habits and with tastes starved small,
And take at once to his impoverished brain
The sudden element that changes things,
That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand
And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?
Is he not such an one as moves to mirth—
Warily parsimonious, when no need,
Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times?
All prudent counsel as to what befits
The golden mean, is lost on such an one :
The man's fantastic will is the man's law.
So here—we call the treasure knowledge, say,
Increased beyond the fleshly faculty—
Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven :
The man is witless of the size, the sum,

The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much.
Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
Assembled to besiege his city now,
And of the passing of a mule with gourds—
'T is one! Then take it on the other side,
Speak of some trifling fact,—he will gaze rapt
With stupor at its very littleness,
(Far as I see) as if in that indeed
He caught prodigious import, whole results;
And so will turn to us the bystanders
In ever the same stupor (note this point)
That we too see not with his opened eyes.
Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,
Preposterously, at cross purposes.
Should his child sicken unto death,—why, look
For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,
Or pretermission of the daily craft!
While a word, gesture, glance from that same child
At play or in the school or laid asleep,
Will startle him to an agony of fear,
Exasperation, just as like. Demand
The reason why—" 't is but a word," object—
"A gesture"—he regards thee as our lord
Who lived there in the pyramid alone,
Looked at us (dost thou mind?) when, being young,

We both would unadvisedly recite
Some charm's beginning, from that book of his,
Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst
All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.
Thou and the child have each a veil alike
Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye both
Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match
Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know !
He holds on firmly to some thread of life—
(It is the life to lead perforcedly)
Which runs across some vast distracting orb
Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—
The spiritual life around the earthly life :
The law of that is known to him as this,
His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.
So is the man perplexed with impulses
Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,
And not along, this black thread through the blaze—
"It should be" baulked by "here it cannot be."
And oft the man's soul springs into his face
As if he saw again and heard again
His sage that bade him "Rise" and he did rise.
Something, a word, a tick o' the blood within
Admonishes : then back he sinks at once

To ashes, who was very fire before,
In sedulous recurrence to his trade
Whereby he earneth him the daily bread ;
And studiously the humbler for that pride,
Professedly the faultier that he knows
God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.
Indeed the especial marking of the man
Is prone submission to the heavenly will—
Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.
'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last
For that same death which must restore his being
To equilibrium, body loosening soul
Divorced even now by premature full growth :
He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live
So long as God please, and just how God please.
He even seeketh not to please God more
(Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.
Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach
The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be,
Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do :
How can he give his neighbour the real ground,
His own conviction? Ardent as he is—
Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old
" Be it as God please " reassureth him.
I probed the sore as thy disciple should :
" How, beast," said I, " this stolid carelessness

“Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
“To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
“Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once?”
He merely looked with his large eyes on me.
The man is apathetic, you deduce?
Contrariwise, he loves both old and young,
Able and weak, affects the very brutes
And birds—how say I? flowers of the field—
As a wise workman recognizes tools
In a master’s workshop, loving what they make.
Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb:
Only impatient, let him do his best,
At ignorance and carelessness and sin—
An indignation which is promptly curbed:
As when in certain travel I have feigned
To be an ignoramus in our art
According to some preconceived design,
And happed to hear the land’s practitioners
Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,
Prattle fantastically on disease,
Its cause and cure—and I must hold my peace!

Thou wilt object—Why have I not ere this
Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene
Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source,
Conferring with the frankness that befits?

Alas ! it grieveth me, the learned leech
Perished in a tumult many years ago,
Accused,—our learning's fate,—of wizardry,
Rebellion, to the setting up a rule
And creed prodigious as described to me.
His death, which happened when the earthquake fell
(Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss
To occult learning in our lord the sage
Who lived there in the pyramid alone)
Was wrought by the mad people—that 's their wont !
On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,
To his tried virtue, for miraculous help—
How could he stop the earthquake? That 's their way !
The other imputations must be lies :
But take one, though I loathe to give it thee,
In mere respect for any good man's fame.
(And after all, our patient Lazarus
Is stark mad ; should we count on what he says?
Perhaps not : though in writing to a leech
'T is well to keep back nothing of a case.)
This man so cured regards the curer, then,
As—God forgive me ! who but God himself,
Creator and sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile !
—'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,

Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,
And must have so avouched himself, in fact,
In hearing of this very Lazarus
Who saith—but why all this of what he saith?
Why write of trivial matters, things of price
Calling at every moment for remark?
I noticed on the margin of a pool
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange !

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,
Which, now that I review it, needs must seem
Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth !
Nor I myself discern in what is writ
Good cause for the peculiar interest
And awe indeed this man has touched me with.
Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness
Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus :
I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
Like an old lion's cheek teeth. Out there came
A moon made like a face with certain spots
Multiform, manifold and menacing :
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met
In this old sleepy town at unaware,
The man and I. I send thee what is writ.

Regard it as a chance, a matter risked
To this ambiguous Syrian—he may lose,
Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.
Jerusalem's repose shall make amends
For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine ;
Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell !

The very God ! think, Abib ; dost thou think ?
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, “ O heart I made, a heart beats here !
“ Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself !
“ Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
“ But love I gave thee, with myself to love
“ And thou must love me who have died for thee ! ”
The madman saith He said so : it is strange.

JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION.

THERE 's heaven above, and night by night
 I look right through its gorgeous roof ;
 No suns and moons though e'er so bright
 Avail to stop me ; splendour-proof
 I keep the broods of stars aloof :
 For I intend to get to God,
 For 't is to God I speed so fast,
 For in God's breast, my own abode,
 Those shoals of dazzling glory, passed,
 I lay my spirit down at last.
 I lie where I have always lain,
 God smiles as he has always smiled ;
 Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
 Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
 The heavens, God thought on me his child ;
 Ordained a life for me, arrayed
 Its circumstances every one
 To the minutest ; ay, God said

This head this hand should rest upon
Thus, ere he fashioned star or sun.
And having thus created me,
Thus rooted me, he bade me grow,
Guiltless for ever, like a tree
That buds and blooms, nor seeks to know
The law by which it prospers so :
But sure that thought and word and deed
All go to swell his love for me,
Me, made because that love had need
Of something irreversibly
Pledged solely its content to be.
Yes, yes, a tree which must ascend,
No poison-gourd foredoomed to stoop :
I have God's warrant, could I blend
All hideous sins, as in a cup,
To drink the mingled venoms up ;
Secure my nature will convert
The draught to blossoming gladness fast :
While sweet dews turn to the gourd's hurt,
And bloat, and while they bloat it, blast,
As from the first its lot was cast.
For as I lie, smiled on, full-fed
By unexhausted power to bless,
I gaze below on hell's fierce bed,

And those its waves of flame oppress,
Swarming in ghastly wretchedness ;
Whose life on earth aspired to be
One altar-smoke, so pure !—to win
If not love like God's love for me,
At least to keep his anger in ;
And all their striving turned to sin.
Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white
With prayer, the broken-hearted nun,
The martyr, the wan acolyte,
The incense-swinging child,—undone
Before God fashioned star or sun !
God, whom I praise ; how could I praise,
If such as I might understand,
Make out and reckon on his ways,
And bargain for his love, and stand,
Paying a price, at his right hand ?

PICTOR IGNOTUS.

FLORENCE, 15—.

I COULD have painted pictures like that youth's
Ye praise so. How my soul springs up! No bar
Stayed me—ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!
—Never did fate forbid me, star by star,
To outburst on your night with all my gift
Of fires from God: nor would my flesh have shrunk
From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift
And wide to heaven, or, straight like thunder, sunk
To the centre, of an instant; or around
Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan
The licence and the limit, space and bound,
Allowed to truth made visible in man.
And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
Over the canvas could my hand have flung,
Each face obedient to its passion's law,
Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue;
Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,
A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,
Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood

Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place ;
Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved,—
O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup?
What did ye give me that I have not saved ?
Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well !)
Of going—I, in each new picture,—forth,
As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,
To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South, or North,
Bound for the calmly-satisfied great State,
Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went,
Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,
Through old streets named afresh from the event,
Till it reached home, where learned age should greet
My face, and youth, the star not yet distinct
Above his hair, lie learning at my feet !—
Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked
With love about, and praise, till life should end,
And then not go to heaven, but linger here,
Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend,—
The thought grew frightful, 't was so wildly dear !
But a voice changed it. Glimpses of such sights
Have scared me, like the revels through a door
Of some strange house of idols at its rites !
This world seemed not the world it was before :
Mixed with my loving trusting ones, there trooped
. . . Who summoned those cold faces that begun

To press on me and judge me? Though I stooped
Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,
They drew me forth, and spite of me . . . enough !
These buy and sell our pictures, take and give,
Count them for garniture and household-stuff,
And where they live needs must our pictures live
And see their faces, listen to their prate,
Partakers of their daily pettiness,
Discussed of,—“ This I love, or this I hate,
“ This likes me more, and this affects me less ! ”
Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint
These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
With the same series, Virgin, Babe and Saint,
With the same cold calm beautiful regard,—
At least no merchant traffics in my heart ;
The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart :
Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine
While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,
They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
So, die my pictures ! surely, gently die !
O youth, men praise so,—holds their praise its worth ?
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry ?
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth ?

FRA LIPPO LIPPI.

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave !
 You need not clap your torches to my face.
 Zooks, what 's to blame? you think you see a monk !
 What, 't is past midnight, and you go the rounds,
 And here you catch me at an alley's end
 Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
 The Carmine 's my cloister : hunt it up,
 Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,
 Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
 And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
Weke, weke, that 's crept to keep him company !
 Aha, you know your betters ! Then, you 'll take
 Your hand away that 's fiddling on my throat,
 And please to know me likewise. Who am I ?
 Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
 Three streets off—he 's a certain . . . how d' ye call ?
 Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
 I' the house that caps the corner. Boh ! you were best !
 Remember and tell me, the day you 're hanged,
 How you affected such a gullet's-gripe !

But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you :
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
And count fair prize what comes into their net ?
He 's Judas to a tittle, that man is !
Just such a face ! Why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I 'm not angry ! Bid your hangdogs go
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbours me
(And many more beside, lads ! more beside !)
And all 's come square again. I 'd like his face—
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds
John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
With one hand (" Look you, now," as who should say)
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped !
It 's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
A wood-coal or the like ? or you should see !
Yes, I 'm the painter, since you style me so.
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
You know them and they take you ? like enough !
I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.
Let 's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
Here 's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
To roam the town and sing out carnival,

And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
And saints again. I could not paint all night—
Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of song,—
Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?
Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.
Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three slim
 shapes,
And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
That 's all I 'm made of! Into shreds it went,
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,
There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
And after them. I came up with the fun
Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—
Flower o' the rose,
If I've been merry, what matter who knows?
And so as I was stealing back again
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep

Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—
Mine 's shaved—a monk, you say—the sting 's in that!
If Master Cosimo announced himself,
Mum 's the word naturally; but a monk!
Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!
I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
While I stood munching my first bread that month:
“So, boy, you 're minded,” quoth the good fat father
Wiping his own mouth, 't was refection-time,—
“To quit this very miserable world?
“Will you renounce” . . . “the mouthful of bread?”
thought I;

By no means ! Brief, they made a monk of me ;
 I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
 Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
 Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
 Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.
 Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
 'T was not for nothing—the good bellyful,
 The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
 And day-long blessed idleness beside !
 “ Let 's see what the urchin 's fit for ”—that came next.
 Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
 Such a to-do ! They tried me with their books :
 Lord, they 'd have taught me Latin in pure waste !
Flower o' the clove,
All the Latin I construe is, “ amo ” I love !
 But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
 Eight years together, as my fortune was,
 Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
 The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
 And who will curse or kick him for his pains,—
 Which gentleman processional and fine,
 Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
 Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
 The droppings of the wax to sell again,
 Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
 How say I ?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop

His bone from the heap of offal in the street,—
 Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
 He learns the look of things, and none the less
 For admonition from the hunger-pinch.
 I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
 Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
 I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
 Scrawled them within the antiphony's marge,
 Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
 Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
 And made a string of pictures of the world
 Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
 On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked
 black.

“Nay,” quoth the Prior, “turn him out, d' ye say?”

“In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.

“What if at last we get our man of parts,

“We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese

“And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine

“And put the front on it that ought to be!”

And hereupon he bade me daub away.

Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
 Never was such prompt disemburdening.

First, every sort of monk, the black and white,

I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,

From good old gossips waiting to confess

Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
With the little children round him in a row
Of admiration, half for his beard and half
For that white anger of his victim's son
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
Signing himself with the other because of Christ
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years)
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
(Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve
On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers
(The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.
I painted all, then cried " 'T is ask and have ;
" Choose, for more 's ready !"—laid the ladder flat,
And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
Being simple bodies,—" That 's the very man !
" Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog !
" That woman 's like the Prior's niece who comes
" To care about his asthma : it 's the life !"
But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funk'd ;
Their betters took their turn to see and say :

The Prior and the learned pulled a face
 And stopped all that in no time. "How? what's here?
 "Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
 "Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
 "As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!
 "Your business is not to catch men with show,
 "With homage to the perishable clay,
 "But lift them over it, ignore it all,
 "Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
 "Your business is to paint the souls of men—
 "Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
 "It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
 "(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
 "It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
 "Give us no more of body than shows soul!
 "Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
 "That sets us praising,—why not stop with him?
 "Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
 "With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
 "Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
 "Rub all out, try at it a second time.
 "Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
 "She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,—
 "Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
 "Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
 A fine way to paint soul, by painting body

So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
And can't fare worse ! Thus, yellow does for white
When what you put for yellow 's simply black,
And any sort of meaning looks intense
When all beside itself means and looks nought.
Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order ? Take the prettiest face,
The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty
You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
Sorrow or joy ? won't beauty go with these ?
Suppose I 've made her eyes all right and blue,
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them threefold ?
Or say there 's beauty with no soul at all—
(I never saw it—put the case the same—)
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents :
That 's somewhat : and you 'll find the soul you have
missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks.
“Rub all out !” Well, well, there 's my life, in short,
And so the thing has gone on ever since.
I 'm grown a man no doubt, I 've broken bounds :
You should not take a fellow eight years old

And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
 I 'm my own master, paint now as I please—
 Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house !
 Lord, it 's fast holding by the rings in front—
 Those great rings serve more purposes than just
 To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse ! .
 And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
 Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
 The heads shake still—" It 's art's decline, my son !
 " You 're not of the true painters, great and old ;
 " Brother Angelico 's the man, you 'll find ;
 " Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer :
 " Fag on at flesh, you 'll never make the third ! "

Flower o' the pine,

You keep your mistr . . . manners, and I 'll stick to mine !

I 'm not the third, then : bless us, they must know !
 Don't you think they 're the likeliest to know,
 They with their Latin ? So, I swallow my rage,
 Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
 To please them—sometimes do and sometimes don't ;
 For, doing most, there 's pretty sure to come
 A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints—
 A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—

(Flower o' the peach,

Death for us all, and his own life for each !)

And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,

The world and life 's too big to pass for a dream,
And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,
In pure rage ! The old mill-horse, out at grass
After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.
What would men have ? Do they like grass or no—
May they or mayn't they ? all I want 's the thing
Settled for ever one way. As it is,
You tell too many lies and hurt yourself :
You don't like what you only like too much,
You do like what, if given you at your word,
You find abundantly detestable.
For me, I think I speak as I was taught ;
I always see the garden and God there
A-making man's wife : and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards,

You understand me : I 'm a beast, I know.
But see, now—why, I see as certainly
As that the morning-star 's about to shine,
What will hap some day. We 've a youngster here
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop :

His name is Guidi—he 'll not mind the monks—
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—
He picks my practice up—he 'll paint apace,
I hope so—though I never live so long,
I know what 's sure to follow. You be judge!
You speak no Latin more than I, belike,
However, you 're my man, you 've seen the world
—The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!
—For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to? What 's it all about?
To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.
But why not do as well as say,—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
God's works—paint anyone, and count it crime
To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
"Are here already; nature is complete:
"Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
"There 's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
For, don't you mark? we 're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed

Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;
 And so they are better, painted—better to us,
 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that ;
 God uses us to help each other so,
 Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
 Your cullion's hanging face ? A bit of chalk,
 And trust me but you should, though ! How much
 more,

If I drew higher things with the same truth !
 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
 Interpret God to all of you ! Oh, oh,
 It makes me mad to see what men shall do
 And we in our graves ! This world's no blot for us,
 Nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good :
 To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
 " Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer !"
 Strikes in the Prior : " when your meaning's plain
 " It does not say to folk—remember matins,
 " Or, mind you fast next Friday !" Why, for this
 What need of art at all ? A skull and bones,
 Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's best,
 A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
 I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
 At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style :
 " How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down ?"
 I ask a brother : " Hugely," he returns —

" Already not one phiz of your three slaves
 " Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
 " But 's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
 " The pious people have so eased their own
 " With coming to say prayers there in a rage :
 " We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
 " Expect another job this time next year,
 " For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—
 " Your painting serves its purpose ! " Hang the fools !

—That is—you 'll not mistake an idle word
 Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, Got wot,
 Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
 The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine !
 Oh, the church knows ! don't misreport me, now !
 It 's natural a poor monk out of bounds
 Should have his apt word to excuse himself :
 And hearken how I plot to make amends.
 I have bethought me : I shall paint a piece
 . . . There 's for you ! Give me six months, then go,
 see
 Something in Sant' Ambrogio's ! Bless the nuns !
 They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
 God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
 Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood,
 Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet

As puff on puff of grated orris-root
When ladies crowd to Church at midsummer.
And then i' the front, of course a saint or two—
Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz (and Us without the z,
Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
Secured at their devotion, up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,
As one by a dark stair into a great light,
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—
Mazed, motionless and moonstruck—I'm the man!
Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear?
I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
I, in this presence, 'this pure company!
Where 's a hole, where 's a corner for escape?
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm—"Not so fast!"
—Addresses the celestial presence, "nay—
"He made you and devised you, after all,
"Though he 's none of you! Could Saint John there
draw—
"His camel-hair make up a painting-brush?

“ We come to brother Lippo for all that,
“ *Iste perfecit opus!*” So, all smile—
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you ’re gay
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go
The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
Like the Prior’s niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
And so all ’s saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!
The street ’s hushed, and I know my own way back,
Don’t fear me! There ’s the grey beginning. Zooks!

ANDREA DEL SARTO.

(CALLED "THE FAULTLESS PAINTER.")

BUT do not let us quarrel any more,
 No, my Lucrezia ; bear with me for once :
 Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
 You turn your face, but does it bring your heart ?
 I 'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
 Treat his own subject after his own way,
 Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
 And shut the money into this small hand
 When next it takes mine. Will it ? tenderly ?
 Oh, I 'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love !
 I often am much wearier than you think,
 This evening more than usual, and it seems
 As if—forgive now—should you let me sit
 Here by the window with your hand in mine
 And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
 Both of one mind, as married people use,
 Quietly, quietly the evening through,
 I might get up to-morrow to my work

Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this !
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
Don't count the time lost, neither ; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require :
It saves a model. So ! keep looking so—
My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds !
—How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there ! oh, so sweet—
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks—no one's : very dear, no less.
You smile ? why, there 's my picture ready made,
There 's what we painters call our harmony !
A common greyness silvers everything,—
All in a twilight, you and I alike
—You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That 's gone you know),—but I, at every point ;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There 's the bell clinking from the chapel-top ;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside ;
The last monk leaves the garden ; days decrease,

And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead ;
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are !
I feel he laid the fetter : let it lie !
This chamber for example—turn your head—
All that 's behind us! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak :
And that cartoon, the second from the door
—It is the thing, Love ! so such things should be—
Behold Madonna !—I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
Do easily, too—what I say, perfectly,
I do not boast, perhaps : yourself are judge,
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate 't is easy, all of it !
No sketches first, no studies, that 's long past :
I do what many dream of, all their lives,
—Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,

And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive—you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,—
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter)—so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that 's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men! at a word—
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what 's a heaven for? All is silver-grey
Placid and perfect with my art : the worse !
I know both what I want and what might gain,
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
" Had I been two, another and myself,
" Our head would have o'erlooked the world ! " No doubt.
Yonder 's a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
('T is copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art—for it gives way ;
That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak : its soul is right,
He means right—that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm ! and I could alter it :
But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
Out of me, out of me ! And wherefore out ?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you !
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,

And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare—
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind !
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
“ God and the glory ! never care for gain.
“ The present by the future, what is that ?
“ Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo !
“ Rafael is waiting : up to God, all three ! ”
I might have done it for you. So it seems :
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self ;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you ?
What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo ?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not ;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive :
Yet the will 's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
’T is safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside ;
But they speak sometimes ; I must bear it all.

Well may they speak ! That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau !
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look,—
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward !
A good time, was it not, my kingly days?
And had you not grown restless . . . but I know—
'T is done and past ; 't was right, my instinct said ;
Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
And I' m the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
How could it end in any other way?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.
The triumph was—to reach and stay there ; since
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?

Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine !
"Rafael did this, Andrea painted that ;
"The Roman's is the better when you pray,
"But still the other's Virgin was his wife—"
Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
Both pictures in your presence ; clearer grows
My better fortune, I resolve to think.
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
Too lifted up in heart because of it)
"Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
"Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
"Who, were he set to plan and execute
"As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
"Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours !"
To Rafael's !—And indeed the arm is wrong.
I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,
Give the chalk here—quick, thus the line should go !
Ay, but the soul ! he's Rafael ! rub it out !
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
(What he ? why, who but Michel Agnolo ?
Do you forget already words like those ?)

If really there was such a chance, so lost,—
Is, whether you 're—not grateful—but more pleased.
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed !
This hour has been an hour ! Another smile ?
If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend ?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
See, it is settled dusk now ; there 's a star ;
Morello 's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, love,—come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me : oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with !
Let us but love each other. Must you go ?
That Cousin here again ? he waits outside ?
Must see you—you, and not with me ? Those loans ?
More gaming debts to pay ? you smiled for that ?
Well, let smiles buy me ! have you more to spend ?
While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work 's my ware, and what 's it worth ?
I 'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit

The grey remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them—that is, Michel Agnolo—
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor,
Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What's better and what's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis!—it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.
Well, had I riches of my own? you see

How one gets rich ! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died :
And I have laboured somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son
Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try !
No doubt, there 's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have ?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
To cover—the three first without a wife,
While I have mine ! So—still they overcome
Because there 's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle ! Go, my Love.

*THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT
SAINT PRAXED'S CHURCH.*

ROME, 15—.

VANITY, saith the preacher, vanity !
Draw round my bed : is Anselm keeping back ?
Nephews—sons mine . . . ah God, I know not ! Well—
She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was !
What 's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world 's a dream.
Life, how and what is it ? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
“ Do I live, am I dead ? ” Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace ;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know :
—Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care ;

Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same !
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk :
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands :
Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse.
—Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him ! True peach,
Rosy and flawless : how I earned the prize !
Draw close : that conflagration of my church
—What then ? So much was saved if aught were missed !
My sons, ye would not be my death ? Go dig
The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, I ! . . .
Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,

Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . .
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst !
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years :
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he ?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons ? Black—
'T was ever antique-black I meant ! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath ?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
Ye mark me not ! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm ? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at !
Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then !
'T is jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve.

My bath must needs be left behind, alas !
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There 's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs ?
—That 's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—
Tully, my masters ? Ulpian serves his need !
And then how I shall lie through centuries,
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke !
For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can
point,
And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work :
And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,

Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
—Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?
No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
To comfort me on my entablature
Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
“Do I live, am I dead?” There, leave me, there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone—
Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—
And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
Well go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,

But in a row : and, going, turn your backs
-Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was !

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY.

No more wine? then we 'll push back chairs and talk.
A final glass for me, though : cool, i' faith !
We ought to have our Abbey back, you see.
It 's different, preaching in basilicas,
And doing duty in some masterpiece
Like this of brother Pugin's, bless his heart !
I doubt if they 're half baked, those chalk rosettes,
Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere ;
It 's just like breathing in a lime-kiln : eh ?
These hot long ceremonies of our church
Cost us a little—oh, they pay the price,
You take me—amply pay it ! Now, we 'll talk.

So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.
No deprecation,—nay, I beg you, sir !
Beside 't is our engagement : don't you know,
I promised, if you 'd watch a dinner out,
We 'd see truth dawn together?—truth that peeps
Over the glasses' edge when dinner 's done,

And body gets its sop and holds its noise
 And leaves soul free a little. Now 's the time :
 'T is break of day ! You do despise me then.
 And if I say, "despise me,"—never fear !
 I know you do not in a certain sense—
 Not in my arm-chair, for example : here,
 I well imagine you respect my place
 (*Status, entourage, worldly circumstance*)
 Quite to its value—very much indeed :
 —Are up to the protesting eyes of you
 In pride at being seated here for once—
 You 'll turn it to such capital account !
 When somebody, through years and years to come,
 Hints of the bishop,—names me—that 's enough :
 "Blougram? I knew him"—(into it you slide)
 "Dined with him once, a Corpus Christi Day,
 "All alone, we two ; he 's a clever man :
 "And after dinner,—why, the wine you know,—
 "Oh, there was wine, and good !—what with the wine . . .
 "'Faith, we began upon all sorts of talk !
 "He 's no bad fellow, Blougram ; he had seen
 "Something of mine he relished, some review :
 "He 's quite above their humbug in his heart,
 "Half-said as much, indeed—the thing 's his trade.
 "I warrant, Blougram 's sceptical at times :
 "How otherwise? I liked him, I confess !"

Che che, my dear sir, as we say at Rome,
 Don't you protest now ! It's fair give and take ;
 You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths :
 The hand 's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays—
 You do despise me ; your ideal of life
 Is not the bishop's : you would not be I.
 You would like better to be Goethe, now,
 Or Buonaparte, or, bless me, lower still,
 Count D'Orsay,—so you did what you preferred,
 Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help,
 Believed or disbelieved, no matter what,
 So long as on that point, whate'er it was,
 You loosed your mind, were whole and sole yourself.
 —That, my ideal never can include,
 Upon that element of truth and worth
 Never be based ! for say they make me Pope—
 (They can't—suppose it for our argument !)
 Why, there I 'm at my tether's end, I 've reached
 My height, and not a height which pleases you :
 An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say.
 It's like those eerie stories nurses tell,
 Of how some actor on a stage played Death,
 With pasteboard crown, sham orb and tinselled dart,
 And called himself the monarch of the world ;

Then, going in the tire-room afterward,
Because the play was done, to shift himself,
Got touched upon the sleeve familiarly,
The moment he had shut the closet door,
By Death himself. Thus God might touch a Pope
At unawares, ask what his baubles mean,
And whose part he presumed to play just now?
Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true !

So, drawing comfortable breath again,
You weigh and find, whatever more or less
I boast of my ideal realized,
Is nothing in the balance when opposed
To your ideal, your grand simple life,
Of which you will not realize one jot.
I am much, you are nothing ; you would be all,
I would be merely much : you beat me there.

No, friend, you do not beat me : hearken why !
The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,
Is—not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be,—but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means : a very different thing !
No abstract intellectual plan of life
Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,

But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,
 May lead within a world which (by your leave)
 Is Rome or London, not Fool's-paradise.
 Embellish Rome, idealize away,
 Make paradise of London if you can,
 You 're welcome, nay, you 're wise.

A simile !

We mortals cross the ocean of this world
 Each in his average cabin of a life ;
 The best 's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.
 Now for our six months' voyage—how prepare?
 You come on shipboard with a landsman's list
 Of things he calls convenient : so they are !
 An India screen is pretty furniture,
 A piano-forte is a fine resource,
 All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,
 The new edition fifty volumes long ;
 And little Greek books, with the funny type
 They get up well at Leipsic, fill the next :
 Go on ! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes !
 And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add !
 'T were pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow
 Hang full in face of one where'er one roams,
 Since he more than the others brings with him
 Italy's self,—the marvellous Modenese !—

Yet was not on your list before, perhaps.
—Alas, friend, here 's the agent . . . is 't the name?
The captain, or whoever 's master here—
You see him screw his face up ; what 's his cry
Ere you set foot on shipboard? “Six feet square !”
If you won't understand what six feet mean,
Compute and purchase stores accordingly—
And if, in pique because he overhauls
Your Jerome, piano, bath, you come on board
Bare—why, you cut a figure at the first
While sympathetic landsmen see you off ;
Not afterward, when long ere half seas over,
You peep up from your utterly naked boards
Into some snug and well-appointed berth,
Like mine for instance (try the cooler jug—
Put back the other, but don't jog the ice !)
And mortified you mutter “Well and good ;
“He sits enjoying his sea-furniture ;
“'T is stout and proper, and there 's store of it :
“Though I 've the better notion, all agree,
“Of fitting rooms up. Hang the carpenter,
“Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances—
“I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all !”
And meantime you bring nothing : never mind—
You 've proved your artist-nature : what you don't
You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

Now come, let's backward to the starting-place.
 See my way: we're two college friends, suppose.
 Prepare together for our voyage, then ;
 Each note and check the other in his work,—
 Here's mine, a bishop's outfit ; criticize !
 What's wrong? why won't you be a bishop too?

Why first, you don't believe, you don't and can't,
 (Not stately, that is, and fixedly
 And absolutely and exclusively)
 In any revelation called divine.
 No dogmas nail your faith ; and what remains
 But say so, like the honest man you are ?
 First, therefore, overhaul theology !
 Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,
 Must find believing every whit as hard :
 And if I do not frankly say as much,
 The ugly consequence is clear enough.

Now wait, my friend : well, I do not believe—
 If you'll accept no faith that is not fixed,
 Absolute and exclusive, as you say.
 You're wrong—I mean to prove it in due time.
 Meanwhile, I know where difficulties lie
 I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,
 So give up hope accordingly to solve—

(To you, and over the wine). Our dogmas then
 With both of us, though in unlike degree,
 Missing full credence—overboard with them!
 I mean to meet you on your own premise:
 Good, there go mine in company with yours!

And now what are we? unbelievers both,
 Calm and complete, determinately fixed
 To-day, to-morrow and for ever, pray?
 You 'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think!
 In no wise! all we've gained is, that belief,
 As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,
 Confounds us like its predecessor. Where 's
 The gain? how can we guard our unbelief,
 Make it bear fruit to us?—the problem here.
 Just when we are safest, there 's a sunset-touch,
 A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
 A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
 And that 's enough for fifty hopes and fears
 As old and new at once as nature's self,
 To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
 Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
 Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
 The grand Perhaps! We look on helplessly.
 There the old misgivings, crooked questions are—
 This good God,—what he could do, if he would,

Would, if he could—then must have done long since :
 If so, when, where and how? some way must be,—
 Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
 Some sense, in which it might be, after all.
 Why not, “ The Way, the Truth, the Life? ”

—That way

Over the mountain, which who stands upon
 Is apt to doubt if it be meant for a road ;
 While, if he views it from the waste itself,
 Up goes the line there, plain from base to brow,
 Not vague, mistakeable ! what ’s a break or two
 Seen from the unbroken desert either side ?
 And then (to bring in fresh philosophy)
 What if the breaks themselves should prove at last
 The most consummate of contrivances
 To train a man’s eye, teach him what is faith ?
 And so we stumble at truth’s very test !
 All we have gained then by our unbelief
 Is a life of doubt diversified by faith,
 For one of faith diversified by doubt :
 We called the chess-board white,—we call it black.

“ Well,” you rejoin, “ the end ’s no worse, at least ;
 “ We ’ve reason for both colours on the board :
 “ Why not confess then, where I drop the faith
 “ And you the doubt, that I ’m as right as you ? ”


Because, friend, in the next place, this being so,
And both things even,—faith and unbelief
Left to a man's choice,—we 'll proceed a step,
Returning to our image, which I like.

A man's choice, yes—but a cabin-passenger's—
The man made for the special life o' the world—
Do you forget him? I remember though!
Consult our ship's conditions and you find
One and but one choice suitable to all;
The choice, that you unluckily prefer,
Turning things topsy-turvy—they or it
Going to the ground. Belief or unbelief
Bears upon life, determines its whole course,
Begins at its beginning. See the world
Such as it is,—you made it not, nor I;
I mean to take it as it is,—and you,
Not so you 'll take it,—though you get nought else.
I know the special kind of life I like,
What suits the most my idiosyncrasy,
Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit
In power, peace, pleasantness and length of days.
I find that positive belief does this
For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.
—For you, it does, however?—that, we 'll try!
'T is clear, I cannot lead my life, at least,

Induce the world to let me peaceably,
Without declaring at the outset, " Friends,
" I absolutely and peremptorily
" Believe !"—I say, faith is my waking life :
One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,
We know, but waking 's the main point with us
And my provision 's for life's waking part.
Accordingly, I use heart, head and hand
All day, I build, scheme, study, and make friends ;
And when night overtakes me, down I lie,
Sleep, dream a little, and get done with it,
The sooner the better, to begin afresh.
What 's midnight doubt before the dayspring's faith ?
You, the philosopher, that disbelieve,
That recognize the night, give dreams their weight—
To be consistent you should keep your bed,
Abstain from healthy acts that prove you man,
For fear you drowse perhaps at unawares !
And certainly at night you 'll sleep and dream,
Live through the day and bustle as you please.
And so you live to sleep as I to wake,
To unbelieve as I to still believe ?
Well, and the common sense o' the world calls you
Bed-ridden,—and its good things come to me.
Its estimation, which is half the fight,
That 's the first-cabin comfort I secure :

The next . . . but you perceive with half an eye!
Come, come, it's best believing, if we may;
You can't but own that!

Next, concede again,
If once we choose belief, on all accounts
We can't be too decisive in our faith,
Conclusive and exclusive in its terms,
To suit the world which gives us the good things.
In every man's career are certain points
Whereon he dares not be indifferent;
The world detects him clearly, if he dare,
As baffled at the game, and losing life.
He may care little or he may care much
For riches, honour, pleasure, work, repose,
Since various theories of life and life's
Success are extant which might easily
Comport with either estimate of these;
And whoso chooses wealth or poverty,
Labour or quiet, is not judged a fool
Because his fellow would choose otherwise:
We let him choose upon his own account
So long as he's consistent with his choice.
But certain points, left wholly to himself,
When once a man has arbitrated on,
We say he must succeed there or go hang.



Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most
Or needs most, whatsoe'er the love or need—
For he can't wed twice. Then, he must avouch,
Or follow, at the least, sufficiently,
The form of faith his conscience holds the best,
Whate'er the process of conviction was :
For nothing can compensate his mistake
On such a point, the man himself being judge :
He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul.

Well now, there 's one great form of Christian faith
I happened to be born in—which to teach
Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,
As best and readiest means of living by ;
The same on examination being proved
The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise
And absolute form of faith in the whole world—
Accordingly, most potent of all forms
For working on the world. Observe, my friend !
Such as you know me, I am free to say,
In these hard latter days which hamper one,
Myself—by no immoderate exercise
Of intellect and learning, but the tact
To let external forces work for me,
—Bid the street's stones be bread and they are
bread ;

Bid Peter's creed, or rather, Hildebrand's,
Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world
And make my life an ease and joy and pride ;
It does so,—which for me 's a great point gained,
Who have a soul and body that exact
A comfortable care in many ways.
There 's power in me and will to dominate
Which I must exercise, they hurt me else :
In many ways I need mankind's respect,
Obedience, and the love that 's born of fear :
While at the same time, there 's a taste I have,
A toy of soul, a titillating thing,
Refuses to digest these dainties crude.
The naked life is gross till clothed upon :
I must take what men offer, with a grace
As though I would not, could I help it, take !
An uniform I wear though over-rich—
Something imposed on me, no choice of mine ;
No fancy-dress worn for pure fancy's sake
And despicable therefore ! now folk kneel
And kiss my hand—of course the Church's hand.
Thus I am made, thus life is best for me,
And thus that it should be I have procured ;
And thus it could not be another way,
I venture to imagine.

You 'll reply,
 So far my choice, no doubt, is a success ;
 But were I made of better elements,
 With nobler instincts, purer tastes, like you,
 I hardly would account the thing success
 Though it did all for me I say.

But, friend,
 We speak of what is ; not of what might be,
 And how 't were better if 't were otherwise.
 I am the man you see here plain enough :
 Grant I 'm a beast, why, beasts must lead beasts' lives !
 Suppose I own at once to tail and claws ;
 The tailless man exceeds me : but being tailed
 I 'll lash out lion fashion, and leave apes
 To dock their stump and dress their haunches up.
 My business is not to remake myself,
 But make the absolute best of what God made.
 Or—our first simile—though you prove me doomed
 To a viler berth still, to the steerage-hole,
 The sheep-pen or the pig-stye, I should strive
 To make what use of each were possible ;
 And as this cabin gets upholstery,
 That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast
 I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes

Enumerated so complacently,
On the mere ground that you forsooth can find
In this particular life I choose to lead
No fit provision for them. Can you not?
Say you, my fault is I address myself
To grosser estimators than should judge?
And that 's no way of holding up the soul,
Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows
One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools'—
Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes that.
I pine among my million imbeciles
(You think) aware some dozen men of sense
Eye me and know me, whether I believe
In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,
And am a fool, or disbelieve in her
And am a knave,—approve in neither case,
Withhold their voices though I look their way:
Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end
(The thing they gave at Florence,—what 's its name?)
While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang
His orchestra of salt-box, tongs and bones,
He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths
Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here—
That even your prime men who appraise their kind

Are men still, catch a wheel within a wheel,
See more in a truth than the truth's simple self,
Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street
Sixty the minute ; what 's to note in that ?
You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack ;
Him you must watch—he 's sure to fall, yet stands !
Our interest 's on the dangerous edge of things.
The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist, demirep
That loves and saves her soul in new French books—
We watch while these in equilibrium keep
The giddy line midway : one step aside,
They 're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line
Before your sages,—just the men to shrink
From the gross weights, coarse scales and labels broad
You offer their refinement. Fool or knave ?
Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave
When there 's a thousand diamond weights between ?
So, I enlist them. Your picked twelve, you 'll find,
Profess themselves indignant, scandalized
At thus being held unable to explain
How a superior man who disbelieves
May not believe as well : that 's Schelling's way !
It 's through my coming in the tail of time,
Nicking the minute with a happy tact.
Had I been born three hundred years ago

They'd say, "What's strange? Blougram of course believes ;"

And, seventy years since, "disbelieves of course."
But now, "He may believe ; and yet, and yet
"How can he ?" All eyes turn with interest.
Whereas, step off the line on either side—
You, for example, clever to a fault,
The rough and ready man who write apace,
Read somewhat seldomer, think perhaps even less—
You disbelieve ! Who wonders and who cares ?
Lord So-and-so—his coat bedropped with wax,
All Peter's chains about his waist, his back
Brave with the needlework of Noodledom—
Believes ! Again, who wonders and who cares ?
But I, the man of sense and learning too,
The able to think yet act, the this, the that,
I, to believe at this late time of day !
Enough ; you see, I need not fear contempt.

—Except it's yours ! Admire me as these may,
You don't. But whom at least do you admire ?
Present your own perfection, your ideal,
Your pattern man for a minute—oh, make haste
Is it Napoleon you would have us grow ?
Concede the means ; allow his head and hand,
(A large concession, clever as you are)

Good! In our common primal element
Of unbelief (we can't believe, you know—
We're still at that admission, recollect!)
Where do you find—apart from, towering o'er
The secondary temporary aims
Which satisfy the gross taste you despise—
Where do you find his star?—his crazy trust
God knows through what or in what? it's alive
And shines and leads him, and that's all we want.
Have we aught in our sober night shall point
Such ends as his were, and direct the means
Of working out our purpose straight as his,
Nor bring a moment's trouble on success
With after-care to justify the same?
—Be a Napoleon, and yet disbelieve—
Why, the man's mad, friend, take his light away!
What's the vague good o' the world, for which you dare
With comfort to yourself blow millions up?
We neither of us see it! we do see
The blown-up millions—spatter of their brains
And writhing of their bowels and so forth,
In that bewildering entanglement
Of horrible eventualities
Past calculation to the end of time!
Can I mistake for some clear word of God
(Which were my ample warrant for it all)

His puff of hazy instinct, idle talk,
 "The State, that 's I," quack-nonsense about crowns,
 And (when one beats the man to his last hold)
 A vague idea of setting things to rights,
 Policing people efficaciously,
 More to their profit, most of all to his own ;
 The whole to end that dismallest of ends
 By an Austrian marriage, cant to us the Church,
 And resurrection of the old *régime* ?
 Would I, who hope to live a dozen years,
 Fight Austerlitz for reasons such and such ?
 No : for, concede me but the merest chance
 Doubt may be wrong—there 's judgment, life to come !
 With just that chance, I dare not. Doubt proves right ?
 This present life is all?—you offer me
 Its dozen noisy years, without a chance
 That wedding an archduchess, wearing lace,
 And getting called by divers new-coined names,
 Will drive off ugly thoughts and let me dine,
 Sleep, read and chat in quiet as I like !
 Therefore I will not.

Take another case ;

Fit up the cabin yet another way.
 What say you to the poets ? shall we write
 Hamlet, Othello—make the world our own,

Without a risk to run of either sort ?
I can't !—to put the strongest reason first.
“ But try,” you urge, “ the trying shall suffice ;
“ The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life :
“ Try to be Shakespeare, leave the rest to fate ! ”
Spare my self-knowledge—there 's no fooling me !
If I prefer remaining my poor self,
I say so not in self-dispraise but praise.
If I 'm a Shakespeare, let the well alone ;
Why should I try to be what now I am ?
If I 'm no Shakespeare, as too probable,—
His power and consciousness and self-delight
And all we want in common, shall I find—
Trying for ever ? while on points of taste
Wherewith, to speak it humbly, he and I
Are dowered alike—I 'll ask you, I or he,
Which in our two lives realizes most ?
Much, he imagined—somewhat, I possess.
He had the imagination ; stick to that !
Let him say, “ In the face of my soul's works
“ Your world is worthless and I touch it not
“ Lest I should wrong them ”—I 'll withdraw my pl
But does he say so ? look upon his life !
Himself, who only can, gives judgment there.
He leaves his towers and gorgeous palaces
To build the trimmest house in Stratford town ;

Saves money, spends it, owns the worth of things,
Giulio Romano's pictures, Dowland's lute ;
Enjoys a show, respects the puppets, too,
And none more, had he seen its entry once,
Than "Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal."
Why then should I who play that personage,
The very Pandulph Shakespeare's fancy made,
Be told that had the poet chanced to start
From where I stand now (some degree like mine
Being just the goal he ran his race to reach)
He would have run the whole race back, forsooth,
And left being Pandulph, to begin write plays ?
Ah, the earth's best can be but the earth's best !
Did Shakespeare live, he could but sit at home
And get himself in dreams the Vatican,
Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls,
And English books, none equal to his own,
Which I read, bound in gold (he never did).
—Terni's fall, Naples' bay and Gothard's top—
Eh, friend ? I could not fancy one of these ;
But, as I pour this claret, there they are :
I've gained them—crossed St. Gothard last July
With ten mules to the carriage and a bed
Slung inside ; is my hap the worse for that ?
We want the same things, Shakespeare and myself,
And what I want, I have : he, gifted more,

Could fancy he too had them when he liked,
But not so thoroughly that, if fate allowed,
He would not have them also in my sense.
We play one game ; I send the ball aloft
No less adroitly that of fifty strokes
Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high
Which sends them back to me : I wish and get.
He struck balls higher and with better skill,
But at a poor fence level with his head,
And hit—his Stratford house, a coat of arms,
Successful dealings in his grain and wool,—
While I receive heaven's incense in my nose
And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.
Ask him, if this life 's all, who wins the game ?

Believe—and our whole argument breaks up.
Enthusiasm 's the best thing, I repeat ;
Only, we can't command it ; fire and life
Are all, dead matter 's nothing, we agree :
And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,
The fact 's the same,—belief's fire, once in us,
Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself :
We penetrate our life with such a glow
As fire lends wood and iron—this turns steel,
That burns to ash—all 's one, fire proves its power
For good or ill, since men call flare success.

But paint a fire, it will not therefore burn.
Light one in me, I'll find it food enough !
Why, to be Luther—that's a life to lead,
Incomparably better than my own.
He comes, reclaims God's earth for God, he says,
Sets up God's rule again by simple means,
Re-opens a shut book, and all is done.
He flared out in the flaring of mankind ;
Such Luther's luck was : how shall such be mine ?
If he succeeded, nothing's left to do :
And if he did not altogether—well,
Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be
I might be also. But to what result ?
He looks upon no future : Luther did.
What can I gain on the denying side ?
Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,
Read the text right, emancipate the world—
The emancipated world enjoys itself
With scarce a thank-you: Blougram told it first
It could not owe a farthing,—not to him
More than Saint Paul ! 't would press its pay, you think ?
Then add there's still that plaguy hundredth chance
Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run—
For what gain ? not for Luther's, who secured
A real heaven in his heart throughout his life,
Supposing death a little altered things.

“ Ay, but since really you lack faith,” you cry,
“ You run the same risk really on all sides,
“ In cool indifference as bold unbelief.
“ As well be Strauss as swing ’twixt Paul and him.
“ It ’s not worth having, such imperfect faith,
“ No more available to do faith’s work
“ Than unbelief like mine. Whole faith, or none !”

Softly, my friend ! I must dispute that point
Once own the use of faith, I ’ll find you faith.
We ’re back on Christian ground. You call for faith
I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.
The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,
If faith o’ercomes doubt. How I know it does?
By life and man’s free will, God gave for that !
To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice :
That ’s our one act, the previous work ’s his own.
You criticize the soul ? it reared this tree—
This broad life and whatever fruit it bears !
What matter though I doubt at every pore,
Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers’ end
Doubts in the trivial work of every day,
Doubts at the very bases of my soul
In the grand moments when she probes herself—
If finally I have a life to show,
The thing I did, brought out in evidence

Against the thing done to me underground
 By hell and all its brood, for aught I know?
 I say, whence sprang this? shows it faith or doubt?
 All 's doubt in me ; where 's break of faith in this?
 It is the idea, the feeling and the love,
 God means mankind should strive for and show forth
 Whatever be the process to that end,—
 And not historic knowledge, logic sound,
 And metaphysical acumen, sure !
 “ What think ye of Christ,” friend? when all 's done
 and said,
 Like you this Christianity or not?
 It may be false, but will you wish it true?
 Has it your vote to be so if it can?
 Trust you an instinct silenced long ago
 That will break silence and enjoy you love
 What mortified philosophy is hoarse,
 And all in vain, with bidding you despise?
 If you desire faith—then you 've faith enough:
 What else seeks God—nay, what else seek ourselves?
 You form a notion of me, we 'll suppose,
 On hearsay ; it 's a favourable one :
 “ But still ” (you add), “ there was no such good man,
 “ Because of contradiction in the facts.
 “ One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome,
 “ This Blougram ; yet throughout the tales of him

“ I see he figures as an Englishman.”

Well, the two things are reconcilable.

But would I rather you discovered that,

Subjoining—“ Still, what matter though they be ?

“ Blougram concerns me nought, born here or
there.”

Pure faith indeed—you know not what you ask !
Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,
Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much
The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.
It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare
Some think, Creation 's meant to show him forth :
I say it 's meant to hide him all it can,
And that 's what all the blessed evil 's for.
Its use in Time is to environ us,
Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough
Against that sight till we can bear its stress.
Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain
And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart
Less certainly would wither up at once
Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.
But time and earth case-harden us to live ;
The feeblest sense is trusted most ; the child
Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,
Plays on and grows to be a man like us.

With me, faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.
Or, if that 's too ambitious,—here 's my box—
I need the excitation of a pinch
Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose
Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.
“ Leave it in peace ” advise the simple folk :
Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,
Say I—let doubt occasion still more faith !

You 'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,
In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.
How you 'd exult if I could put you back
Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,
Geology, ethnology, what not
(Greek endings, each the little passing-bell
That signifies some faith 's about to die),
And set you square with Genesis again,—
When such a traveller told you his last news,
He saw the ark a-top of Ararat
But did not climb there since 't was getting dusk
And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot !
How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,
How act? As other people felt and did ;
With soul more blank than this decanter's knob,

Believe—and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate
Full in belief's face, like the beast you 'd be !

No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head—
Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—
He's left, himself, i' the middle: the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life !
Never leave growing till the life to come !
Here, we've got callous to the Virgin's winks
That used to puzzle people wholesomely :
Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.
What are the laws of nature, not to bend
If the Church bid them?—brother Newman asks.
Up with the Immaculate Conception, then—
On to the rack with faith !—is my advice.
Will not that hurry us upon our knees,
Knocking our breasts, “ It can't be—yet it shall !
“ Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope?
“ Low things confound the high things !” and so forth
That's better than acquitting God with grace
As some folk do. He's tried—no case is proved,
Philosophy is lenient—he may go !

You'll say, the old system's not so obsolete
But men believe still: ay, but who and where?

King Bomba's lazzaroni foster yet
The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes ;
But even of these, what ragamuffin-sain:
Believes God watches him continually,
As he believes in fire that it will burn,
Or rain that it will drench him? Break fire's law,
Sin against rain, although the penalty
Be just a singe or soaking? "No," he smiles ;
"Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves."

The sum of all is—yes, my doubt is great,
My faith's still greater, then my faith's enough.
I have read much, thought much, experienced much,
Yet would die rather than avow my fear
The Naples' liquefaction may be false,
When set to happen by the palace-clock
According to the clouds or dinner-time.
I hear you recommend, I might at least
Eliminate, degrassify my faith
Since I adopt it ; keeping what I must
And leaving what I can—such points as this.
I won't—that is, I can't throw one away.
Supposing there's no truth in what I hold
About the need of trial to man's faith,
Still, when you bid me purify the same,
To such a process I discern no end.

Clearing off one excrescence to see two,
 There's ever a next in size, now grown as big,
 That meets the knife : I cut and cut again !
 First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last
 But Fichte's clever cut at God himself ?
 Experimentalize on sacred things !
 I trust nor hand nor eye nor heart nor brain
 To stop betimes : they all get drunk alike.
 The first step, I am master not to take.

You'd find the cutting-process to your taste
 As much as leaving growths of lies unpruned,
 Nor see more danger in it,—you retort.
 Your taste's worth mine ; but my taste proves
 more wise

When we consider that the steadfast hold
 On the extreme end of the chain of faith
 Gives all the advantage, makes the difference
 With the rough purblind mass we seek to rule :
 We are their lords, or they are free of us,
 Just as we tighten or relax our hold.
 So, others matters equal, we'll revert
 To the first problem—which, if solved my way
 And thrown into the balance, turns the scale—
 How we may lead a comfortable life,
 How suit our luggage to the cabin's size.

Of course you are remarking all this time
How narrowly and grossly I view life,
Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule
The masses, and regard complacently
"The cabin," in our old phrase. Well, I do.
I act for, talk for, live for this world now,
As this world prizes action, life and talk :
No prejudice to what next world may prove,
Whose new laws and requirements, my best pledge
To observe then, is that I observe these now,
Shall do hereafter what I do meanwhile.
Let us concede (gratuitously though)
Next life relieves the soul of body, yields
Pure spiritual enjoyment : well, my friend,
Why lose this life i' the meantime, since its use
May be to make the next life more intense?

Do you know, I have often had a dream
(Work it up in your next month's article)
Of man's poor spirit in its progress, still
Losing true life for ever and a day
Through ever trying to be and ever being—
In the evolution of successive spheres—
Before its actual sphere and place of life,
Halfway into the next, which having reached,
It shoots with corresponding foolery

Halfway into the next still, on and off !
 As when a traveller, bound from North to South,
 Scouts fur in Russia : what 's its use in France?
 In France spurns flannel : where 's its need in Spain?
 In Spain drops cloth, too cumbrous for Algiers !
 Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,
 A superfluity at Timbuctoo.
 When, through his journey, was the fool at ease?
 I 'm at ease now, friend ; worldly in this world,
 I take and like its way of life ; I think
 My brothers, who administer the means,
 Live better for my comfort—that 's good too ;
 And God, if he pronounce upon such life,
 Approves my service, which is better still.
 If he keep silence,—why, for you or me
 Or that brute beast pulled-up in to-day's "Times,"
 What odds is 't, save to ourselves, what life we lead?

You meet me at this issue : you declare,—
 All special-pleading done with—truth is truth,
 And justifies itself by undreamed ways.
 You don't fear but it 's better, if we doubt,
 To say so, act up to our truth perceived
 However feebly. Do then,—act away !
 'T is there I 'm on the watch for you. How one acts
 Is, both of us agree, our chief concern :

And how you 'll act is what I fain would see
If, like the candid person you appear,
You dare to make the most of your life's scheme
As I of mine, live up to its full law
Since there 's no higher law that counterchecks.
Put natural religion to the test
You 've just demolished the revealed with—quick,
Down to the root of all that checks your will,
All prohibition to lie, kill and thieve,
Or even to be an atheistic priest !
Suppose a pricking to incontinence—
Philosophers deduce you chastity
Or shame, from just the fact that at the first
Whoso embraced a woman in the field,
Threw club down and forewent his brains beside,
So, stood a ready victim in the reach
Of any brother savage, club in hand ;
Hence saw the use of going out of sight
In wood or cave to prosecute his loves :
I read this in a French book t' other day.
Does law so analysed coerce you much ?
Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end,
But you who reach where the first thread begins,
You 'll soon cut that !—which means you can, but
won't,
Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out,

You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,
But there they are, and so you let them rule.
Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,
A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,
Without the good the slave expects to get,
In case he has a master after all !
You own your instincts? why, what else do I,
Who want, am made for, and must have a God
Ere I can be aught, do aught?—no mere name
Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,
To wit, a relation from that thing to me,
Touching from head to foot—which touch I feel,
And with it take the rest, this life of ours !
I live my life here ; yours you dare not live.

—Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)
Disfigure such a life and call it names,
While, to your mind, remains another way
For simple men : knowledge and power have rights,
But ignorance and weakness have rights too.
There needs no crucial effort to find truth
If here or there or anywhere about :
We ought to turn each side, try hard and see,
And if we can't, be glad we 've earned at least
The right, by one laborious proof the more,
To graze in peace earth's pleasant pasturage.

Men are not angels, neither are they brutes :
Something we may see, all we cannot see.
What need of lying? I say, I see all,
And swear to each detail the most minute
In what I think a Pan's face—you, mere cloud :
I swear I hear him speak and see him wink,
For fear, if once I drop the emphasis,
Mankind may doubt there 's any cloud at all.
You take the simple life—ready to see,
Willing to see (for no cloud 's worth a face)—
And leaving quiet what no strength can move,
And which, who bids you move? who has the right?
I bid you ; but you are God's sheep, not mine :
“ *Pastor est tui Dominus.*” You find
In this the pleasant pasture of our life
Much you may eat without the least offence,
Much you don't eat because your maw objects,
Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock
Open great eyes at you and even butt,
And thereupon you like your mates so well
You cannot please yourself, offending them ;
Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep,
You weigh your pleasure with their butts and bleats
And strike the balance. Sometimes certain fears
Restrain you, real checks since you find them so ;
Sometimes you please yourself and nothing checks :

And thus you graze through life with not one lie,
And like it best.

But do you, in truth's name?
If so, you beat—which means you are not I—
Who needs must make earth mine and feed my fill
Not simply unbutted at, unbickered with,
But motioned to the velvet of the sward
By those obsequious wethers' very selves.
Look at me, sir ; my age is double yours :
At yours, I knew beforehand, so enjoyed,
What now I should be—as, permit the word,
I pretty well imagine your whole range
And stretch of tether twenty years to come.
We both have minds and bodies much alike :
In truth's name, don't you want my bishopric,
My daily bread, my influence and my state?
You 're young. I 'm old ; you must be old one day
Will you find then, as I do hour by hour,
Women their lovers kneel to, who cut curls
From your fat lap-dog's ear to grace a brooch—
Dukes, who petition just to kiss your ring—
With much beside you know or may conceive ?
Suppose we die to-night : well, here am I,
Such were my gains, life bore this fruit to me,
While writing all the same my articles

On music, poetry, the fictile vase
Found at Albano, chess, Anacreon's Greek.
But you—the highest honour in your life,
The thing you 'll crown yourself with, all your days,
Is—dining here and drinking this last glass
I pour you out in sign of amity
Before we part for ever. Of your power
And social influence, worldly worth in short,
Judge what 's my estimation by the fact,
I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,
Hint secrecy on one of all these words !
You 're shrewd and know that should you publish one
The world would brand the lie—my enemies first,
Who 'd sneer—"the bishop 's an arch-hypocrite
"And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool."
Whereas I should not dare for both my ears
Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile,
Before the chaplain who reflects myself—
My shade 's so much more potent than your flesh.
What 's your reward, self-abnegating friend ?
Stood you confessed of those exceptional
And privileged great natures that dwarf mine—
A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,
A poet just about to print his ode,
A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,
An artist whose religion is his art—

I should have nothing to object : such men
Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,
Their drugget 's worth my purple, they beat me.
But you,—you 're just as little those as I—
You, Gigadibs, who, thirty years of age,
Write stately for Blackwood's Magazine,
Believe you see two points in Hamlet's soul
Unseized by the Germans yet—which view you 'll print—
Meantime the best you have to show being still
That lively lightsome article we took
Almost for the true Dickens,—what 's its name ?
“The Slum and Cellar, or Whitechapel life
“Limned after dark !” it made me laugh, I know,
And pleased a month, and brought you in ten pounds.
—Success I recognize and compliment,
And therefore give you, if you choose, three words
(The card and pencil-scratch is quite enough)
Which whether here, in Dublin or New York,
Will get you, prompt as at my eyebrow's wink,
Such terms as never you aspired to get
In all our own reviews and some not ours.
Go write your lively sketches ! be the first
“Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence ”—
Or better simply say, “The Outward-bound.”
Why, men as soon would throw it in my teeth
As copy and quote the infamy chalked broad
About me on the church-door opposite.

You will not wait for that experience though,
I fancy, howsoever you decide,
To discontinue—not detesting, not
Defaming, but at least—despising me !

Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour
Sylvester Blougram, styled *in partibus*
Episcopus, nec non—(the deuce knows what
It's changed to by our novel hierarchy)
With Gigadibs the literary man,
Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,
And ranged the olive-stones about its edge,
While the great bishop rolled him out a mind
Long crumpled, till creased consciousness lay smooth.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.
The other portion, as he shaped it thus
For argumentatory purposes,
He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.
Some arbitrary accidental thoughts
That crossed his mind, amusing because new,
He chose to represent as fixtures there,
Invariable convictions (such they seemed
Beside his interlocutor's loose cards
Flung daily down, and not the same way twice)

While certain hell-deep instincts, man's weak tongue
Is never bold to utter in their truth
Because styled hell-deep ('t is an old mistake
To place hell at the bottom of the earth)
He ignored these,—not having in readiness
Their nomenclature and philosophy :
He said true things, but called them by wrong name
“ On the whole,” he thought, “ I justify myself
“ On every point where cavillers like this
“ Oppugn my life : he tries one kind of fence,
“ I close, he's worsted, that's enough for him.
“ He's on the ground : if ground should break away
“ I take my stand on, there's a firmer yet
“ Beneath it, both of us may sink and reach.
“ His ground was over mine and broke the first :
“ So, let him sit with me this many a year ! ”

He did not sit five minutes. Just a week
Sufficed his sudden healthy vehemence.
Something had struck him in the “ Outward-bound
Another way than Blougram's purpose was :
And having bought, not cabin-furniture
But settler's-implements (enough for three)
And started for Australia—there, I hope,
By this time he has tested his first plough,
And studied his last chapter of St. John.

CLEON.

“As certain also of your own poets have said”—

CLEON the poet (from the sprinkled isles,
 Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea,
 And laugh their pride when the light wave lips
 “Greece”)—
 To Protus in his Tyranny: much health!

They give thy letter to me, even now:
 I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.
 The master of thy galley still unloads
 Gift after gift; they block my court at last
 And pile themselves along its portico
 Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee:
 And one white she-slave from the group dispersed
 Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work
 Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,
 Now covered with this settle-down of doves),
 One lyric woman, in her crocus vest

Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands
Commends to me the strainer and the cup
Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence
For so shall men remark, in such an act
Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,
Thy recognition of the use of life ;
Nor call thy spirit barely adequate
To help on life in straight ways, broad enough
For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest.
Thou, in the daily building of thy tower,—
Whether in fierce and sudden spasms of toil,
Or through dim lulls of unapparent growth,
Or when the general work 'mid good acclaim
Climbed with the eye to cheer the architect,—
Didst ne'er engage in work for mere work's sake—
Hadst ever in thy heart the luring hope
Of some eventual rest a-top of it,
Whence, all the tumult of the building hushed,
Thou first of men mightst look out to the East :
The vulgar saw thy tower, thou sawest the sun.
For this, I promise on thy festival
To pour libation, looking o'er the sea,
Making this slave narrate thy fortunes, speak
Thy great words, and describe thy royal face—

Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the most,
Within the eventual element of calm.

Thy letter's first requirement meets me here.
It is as thou hast heard: in one short life
I, Cleon, have effected all those things
Thou wonderingly dost enumerate.
That epos on thy hundred plates of gold
Is mine,—and also mine the little chant,
So sure to rise from every fishing-bark
When, lights at prow, the seamen haul their net.
The image of the sun-god on the phare,
Men turn from the sun's self to see, is mine ;
The Pœcile, o'er-storied its whole length,
As thou didst hear, with painting, is mine too.
I know the true proportions of a man
And woman also, not observed before ;
And I have written three books on the soul,
Proving absurd all written hitherto,
And putting us to ignorance again.
For music,—why, I have combined the moods
Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine ;
Thus much the people know and recognize,
Throughout our seventeen islands. Marvel not.
We of these latter days, with greater mind
Than our forerunners, since more composite,

Look not so great, beside their simple way,
To a judge who only sees one way at once,
One mind-point and no other at a time,—
Compares the small part of a man of us
With some whole man of the heroic age,
Great in his way—not ours, nor meant for ours.
And ours is greater, had we skill to know :
For, what we call this life of men on earth,
This sequence of the soul's achievements here
Being, as I find much reason to conceive,
Intended to be viewed eventually
As a great whole, not analyzed to parts,
But each part having reference to all,—
How shall a certain part, pronounced complete,
Endure effacement by another part ?
Was the thing done ?—then, what 's to do again ?
See, in the chequered pavement opposite,
Suppose the artist made a perfect rhomb,
And next a lozenge, then a trapezoid—
He did not overlay them, superimpose
The new upon the old and blot it out,
But laid them on a level in his work,
Making at last a picture ; there it lies.
So, first the perfect separate forms were made,
The portions of mankind ; and after, so,
Occurred the combination of the same.

For where had been a progress, otherwise ?
Mankind, made up of all the single men,—
In such a synthesis the labour ends.
Now mark me ! those divine men of old time
Have reached, thou sayest well, each at one point
The outside verge that rounds our faculty ;
And where they reached, who can do more than reach ?
It takes but little water just to touch
At some one point the inside of a sphere,
And, as we turn the sphere, touch all the rest
In due succession : but the finer air
Which not so palpably nor obviously,
Though no less universally, can touch
The whole circumference of that emptied sphere,
Fills it more fully than the water did ;
Holds thrice the weight of water in itself
Resolved into a subtler element.
And yet the vulgar call the sphere first full
Up to the visible height—and after, void ;
Not knowing air's more hidden properties.
And thus our soul, misknown, cries out to Zeus
To vindicate his purpose in our life :
Why stay we on the earth unless to grow ?
Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out,
That he or other god descended here
And, once for all, showed simultaneously

What, in its nature, never can be shown,
Piecemeal or in succession ;—showed, I say,
The worth both absolute and relative
Of all his children from the birth of time,
His instruments for all appointed work.
I now go on to image,—might we hear
The judgment which should give the due to each,
Show where the labour lay and where the ease,
And prove Zeus' self, the latent everywhere !
This is a dream :—but no dream, let us hope,
That years and days, the summers and the springs,
Follow each other with unwaning powers.
The grapes which dye thy wine are richer far,
Through culture, than the wild wealth of the rock ;
The suave plum than the savage-tasted drupe ;
The pastured honey-bee drops choicer sweet ;
The flowers turn double, and the leaves turn flowers
That young and tender crescent-moon, thy slave,
Sleeping above her robe as buoyed by clouds,
Refines upon the women of my youth.
What, and the soul alone deteriorates?
I have not chanted verse like Homer, no—
Nor swept string like Terpander, no—nor carved
And painted men like Phidias and his friend :
I am not great as they are, point by point.
But I have entered into sympathy

With these four, running these into one soul,
Who, separate, ignored eachother's art.
Say, is it nothing that I know them all?
The wild flower was the larger ; I have dashed
Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup's
Honey with wine, and driven its seed to fruit,
And show a better flower if not so large :
I stand myself. Refer this to the gods
Whose gift alone it is ! which, shall I dare
(All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext
That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,
Discourse of lightly or depreciate?
It might have fallen to another's hand : what then?
I pass too surely : let at least truth stay !

And next, of what thou followest on to ask.
This being with me as I declare, O king,
My works, in all these varicoloured kinds,
So done by me, accepted so by men—
Thou askest, if (my soul thus in men's hearts)
I must not be accounted to attain
The very crown and proper end of life?
Inquiring thence how, now life closeth up,
I face death with success in my right hand :
Whether I fear death less than dost thyself
The fortunate of men? "For" (writest thou)

“Thou leavest much behind, while I leave nought.
“Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing,
“The pictures men shall study; while my life,
“Complete and whole now in its power and joy,
“Dies altogether with my brain and arm,
“Is lost indeed; since, what survives myself?
“The brazen statue to o'erlook my grave,
“Set on the promontory which I named.
“And that—some supple courtier of my heir
“Shall use its robed and sceptred arm, perhaps,
“To fix the rope to, which best drags it down.
“I go then: triumph thou, who dost not go!”

Nay, thou art worthy of hearing my whole mind.
Is this apparent, when thou turn'st to muse
Upon the scheme of earth and man in chief,
That admiration grows as knowledge grows?
That imperfection means perfection hid,
Reserved in part, to grace the after-time?
If, in the morning of philosophy,
Ere aught had been recorded, nay perceived,
Thou, with the light now in thee, couldst have look
On all earth's tenantry, from worm to bird,
Ere man, her last, appeared upon the stage—
Thou wouldst have seen them perfect, and deduced
The perfectness of others yet unseen.

Conceding which,—had Zeus then questioned thee
“ Shall I go on a step, improve on this,
“ Do more for visible creatures than is done ? ”
Thou wouldst have answered, “ Ay, by making each
“ Grow conscious in himself—by that alone.
“ All ’s perfect else : the shell sucks fast the rock,
“ The fish strikes through the sea, the snake both swims
“ And slides, forth range the beasts, the birds take
flight,
“ Till life’s mechanics can no further go—
“ And all this joy in natural life is put
“ Like fire from off thy finger into each,
“ So exquisitely perfect is the same.
“ But ’t is pure fire, and they mere matter are ;
“ It has them, not they it : and so I choose
“ For man, thy last premeditated work
“ (If I might add a glory to the scheme)
“ That a third thing should stand apart from both,
“ A quality arise within his soul,
“ Which, intro-active, made to supervise
“ And feel the force it has, may view itself,
“ And so be happy.” Man might live at first
The animal life : but is there nothing more ?
In due time, let him critically learn
How he lives ; and, the more he gets to know
Of his own life’s adaptabilities,

The more joy-giving will his life become.
Thus man, who hath this quality, is best.

But thou, king, hadst more reasonably said :
“ Let progress end at once,—man make no step
“ Beyond the natural man, the better beast,
“ Using his senses, not the sense of sense.”
In man there 's failure, only since he left
The lower and unconscious forms of life.
We called it an advance, the rendering plain
Man's spirit might grow conscious of man's life,
And, by new lore so added to the old,
Take each step higher over the brute's head.
This grew the only life, the pleasure-house,
Watch-tower and treasure-fortress of the soul,
Which whole surrounding flats of natural life
Seemed only fit to yield subsistence to ;
A tower that crowns a country. But alas,
The soul now climbs it just to perish there !
For thence we have discovered ('t is no dream—
We know this, which we had not else perceived)
That there 's a world of capability
For joy, spread round about us, meant for us,
Inviting us ; and still the soul craves all,
And still the flesh replies, “ Take no jot more
“ Than ere thou clombst the tower to look abroad

" Nay, so much less as that fatigue has brought
 " Deduction to it." We struggle, fain to enlarge
 Our bounded physical recipiency,
 Increase our power, supply fresh oil to life,
 Repair the waste of age and sickness : no,
 It skills not ! life 's inadequate to joy,
 As the soul sees joy, tempting life to take.
 They praise a fountain in my garden here
 Wherein a Naiad sends the water-bow
 Thin from her tube ; she smiles to see it rise.
 What if I told her, it is just a thread
 From that great river which the hills shut up,
 And mock her with my leave to take the same ?
 The artificer has given her one small tube
 Past power to widen or exchange—what boots
 To know she might spout oceans if she could ?
 She cannot lift beyond her first thin thread :
 And so a man can use but a man's joy
 While he sees God's. Is it for Zeus to boast,
 " See, man, how happy I live, and despair—
 " That I may be still happier—for thy use !"
 If this were so, we could not thank our lord,
 As hearts beat on to doing ; 't is not so—
 Malice it is not. Is it carelessness ?
 Still, no. If care—where is the sign ? I ask,
 And get no answer, and agree in sum,

O king, with thy profound discouragement,
Who seest the wider but to sigh the more.
Most progress is most failure : thou savest well.

The last point now :—thou dost except a case—
Holding joy not impossible to one
With artist-gifts—to such a man as I
Who leave behind me living works indeed ;
For, such a poem, such a painting lives.
What? dost thou verily trip upon a word,
Confound the accurate view of what joy is
(Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes than thine)
With feeling joy? confound the knowing how
And showing how to live (my faculty)
With actually living?—Otherwise
Where is the artist's vantage o'er the king?
Because in my great epos I display
How divers men young, strong, fair, wise, can act-
Is this as though I acted? if I paint,
Carve the young Phoebus, am I therefore young?
Methinks I 'm older that I bowed myself
The many years of pain that taught me art!
Indeed, to know is something, and to prove
How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is more :
But, knowing nought, to enjoy is something too.
Yon rower, with the moulded muscles there,

Lowering the sail, is nearer it than I.
I can write love-odes : thy fair slave 's an ode.
I get to sing of love, when grown too grey
For being beloved : she turns to that young man,
The muscles all a-ripple on his back.
I know the joy of kingship : well, thou art king !

“ But,” sayest thou—(and I marvel, I repeat
To find thee trip on such a mere word) “ what
“ Thou writest, paintest, stays ; that does not die :
“ Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,
“ And Æschylus, because we read his plays !”
Why, if they live still, let them come and take
Thy slave in my despite, drink from thy cup,
Speak in my place. Thou diest while I survive?
Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,
In this, that every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen ;
While every day my hairs fall more and more,
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase—
The horror quickening still from year to year,
The consummation coming past escape
When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy—
When all my works wherein I prove my worth,
Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,

Alive still, in the praise of such as thou,
I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
The man who loved his life so over-much,
Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,
I dare at times imagine to my need
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
Unlimited in capability
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
—To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us :
That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait
On purpose to make prized the life at large—
Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,
We burst there as the worm into the fly,
Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But no
Zeus has not yet revealed it ; and alas,
He must have done so, were it possible !

Live long and happy, and in that thought die :
Glad for what was ! Farewell. And for the rest,
I cannot tell thy messenger aright
Where to deliver what he bears of thine
To one called Paulus ; we have heard his fame—
Indeed, if Christus be not one with him—
I know not, nor am troubled much to know.
Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcized,

Hath access to a secret shut from us?
Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,
In stooping to inquire of such an one,
As if his answer could impose at all!
He writeth, doth he? well, and he may write.
Oh, the Jew findeth scholars! certain slaves
Who touched on this same isle, preached him and
Christ;
And (as I gathered from a bystander)
Their doctrine could be held by no sane man.

RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOL.

I.

I KNOW a Mount, the gracious Sun perceives
First, when he visits, last, too, when he leaves
The world ; and, vainly favoured, it repays
The day-long glory of his steadfast gaze
By no change of its large calm front of snow.
And underneath the Mount, a Flower I know,
He cannot have perceived, that changes ever
At his approach ; and, in the lost endeavour
To live his life, has parted, one by one,
With all a flower's true graces, for the grace
Of being but a foolish mimic sun,
With ray-like florets round a disk-like face.
Men nobly call by many a name the Mount
As over many a land of theirs its large
Calm front of snow like a triumphal targe
Is reared, and still with old names, fresh names v
Each to its proper praise and own account :
Men call the Flower- the Sunflower, sportively.

II.

Oh, Angel of the East, one, one gold look
Across the waters to this twilight nook,
—The far sad waters, Angel, to this nook !

III.

Dear Pilgrim, art thou for the East indeed?
Go !—saying ever as thou dost proceed,
That I, French Rudel, choose for my device
A sunflower outspread like a sacrifice
Before its idol. See ! These inexpert
And hurried fingers could not fail to hurt
The woven picture ; 't is a woman's skill
Indeed ; but nothing baffled me, so, ill
Or well, the work is finished. Say, men feed
On songs I sing, and therefore bask the bees
On my flower's breast as on a platform broad :
But, as the flower's concern is not for these
But solely for the sun, so men applaud
In vain this Rudel, he not looking here
But to the East—the East ! Go, say this, Pilgrim
dear !

ONE WORD MORE *

TO E. B. B.

1855.

I.

THERE they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished !
Take them, Love, the book and me together :
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II.

Rafael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas :
These, the world might view—but one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask ? Your heart instructs you.

* Originally appended to the collection of Poems called "Men and Women," the greater portion of which has now been, more correctly, distributed under the other titles of this edition.

Did she live and love it all her life-time ?
 Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
 Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
 Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
 Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving—
 Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
 Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's ?

III.

You and I would rather read that volume,
 (Taken to his beating bosom by it)
 Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
 Would we not ? than wonder at Madonnas—
 Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
 Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
 Her, that 's left with lilies in the Louvre—
 Seen by us and all the world in circle.

IV.

You and I will never read that volume.
 Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple
 Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
 Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
 Cried, and the world cried too, " Ours, the
 treasure !"
 Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V.

Dante once prepared to paint an angel :
Whom to please? You whisper " Beatrice."
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence)—
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel,—
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he—" Certain people of importance"
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)
" Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
Says the poet—" Then I stopped my painting."

VI.

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not ?—than read a fresh Inferno.

VII.

You and I will never see that picture.
While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke, those "people of importance :"
We and Bice bear the loss for ever.

VIII.

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
This : no artist lives and loves, that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only,
(Ah, the prize !) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient—
Using nature that 's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that 's turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper dowry,—
Does he paint? he fain would write a poem,—
Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one only,
So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX.

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement !
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked—"Shall smiting help us!
When they drank and sneered—"A stroke is easy!"
When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,
Throwing him for thanks—"But drought was pleasant.
Thus old memories mar the actual triumph ;
Thus the doing savours of disrelish ;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat ;
O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness—the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude—
"How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?"
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel—
"Egypt's flesh-pots—nay, the drought was better."

X.

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant !
Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI.

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the Æthiopian bondslave,)
He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert ;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII.

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me ;
So it seems : I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me ;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing :
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love !

XIII.

Yet a semblance of resource avails us—
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.
He who works in fresco, steals a hair-brush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets.
He who blows thro' bronze, may breathe thro' silver,
Fittly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once as I do.

XIV.

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving :
I am mine and yours—the rest be all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland or Andrea,

Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished ;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also !
Poor the speech ; be how I speak, for all things.

xv.

Not but that you know me ! Lo, the moon's self !
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbrued with colour,
Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the houseroofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

xvi.

What, there 's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
Nay: for if that moon could love a mortal
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy
All her magic ('t is the old sweet mythos)

She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman—
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats—him, even !
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal—
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better !
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work
When they ate and drank and saw God also !

XVII.

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall know.
Only this is sure—the sight were other,
Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures

Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her !

XVIII.

This I say of me, but think of you, Love !
This to you—yourself my moon of poets !
Ah, but that 's the world's side, there 's the wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you !
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you—
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX.

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel—borne, see, on my bosom !

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