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Vol. 1

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THE
RING AND THE BOOK.

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IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., LONDON.

1869.

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THE
RING AND THE BOOK.

X.

THE POPE.

LIKE to Ahasuerus, that shrewd prince,
I will begin,—as is, these seven years now,
My daily wont,—and read a History
(Written by one whose deft right hand was dust
To the last digit, ages ere my birth) 5
Of all my predecessors, Popes of Rome :
For though mine ancient early dropped the pen,
Yet others picked it up and wrote it dry,
Since of the making books there is no end.
And so I have the Papacy complete 10
From Peter first to Alexander last ;
Can question each and take instruction so.

Have I to dare,—I ask, how dared this Pope ?
 To suffer ? Suchanone, how suffered he ?
 Being about to judge, as now, I seek 15
 How judged once, well or ill, some other Pope ;
 Study some signal judgment that subsists
 To blaze on, or else blot, the page which seals
 The sum up of what gain or loss to God
 Came of His one more Vicar in the world. 20
 So, do I find example, rule of life ;
 So, square and set in order the next page,
 Shall be stretched smooth o'er my own funeral cyst.

Eight hundred years exact before the year
 I was made Pope, men made Formosus Pope, 25
 Say Sigebert and other chroniclers.
 Ere I confirm or quash the Trial here
 Of Guido Franceschini and his friends,
 Read,—how there was a ghastly Trial once
 Of a dead man by a live man, and both, Popes : 30
 Thus—in the antique penman's very phrase.

“ Then Stephen, Pope and seventh of the name,
 “ Cried out, in synod as he sat in state,
 “ While choler quivered on his brow and beard,

“ ‘ Come into court, Formosus, thou lost wretch, 35

“ ‘ That claimedst to be late the Pope as I !’

“ And at the word, the great door of the church

“ Flew wide, and in they brought Formosus’ self,

“ The body of him, dead, even as embalmed

“ And buried duly in the Vatican 40

“ Eight months before, exhumed thus for the nonce.

“ They set it, that dead body of a Pope,

“ Clothed in pontific vesture now again,

“ Upright on Peter’s chair as if alive.

“ And Stephen, springing up, cried furiously 45

“ ‘ Bishop of Porto, wherefore didst presume

“ ‘ To leave that see and take this Roman see,

“ ‘ Exchange the lesser for the greater see,

“ ‘ —A thing against the canons of the Church?’

“ Then one, (a Deacon who, observing forms, 50

“ Was placed by Stephen to repel the charge,

“ Be advocate and mouthpiece of the corpse)

“ Spoke as he dared, set stammeringly forth

“ With white lips and dry tongue,—as but a youth,

“ For frightful was the corpse-face to behold,— 55

“ How nowise lacked there precedent for this.

“ But when, for his last precedent of all,
 “ Emboldened by the Spirit, out he blurts
 “ ‘ And, Holy Father, didst not thou thyself
 “ ‘ Vacate the lesser for the greater see, 60
 “ ‘ Half a year since change Arago for Rome ?’
 “ ‘ —Ye have the sin’s defence now, synod mine !’
 “ Shrieks Stephen in a beastly froth of rage :
 “ ‘ Judge now betwixt him dead and me alive !
 “ ‘ Hath he intruded or do I pretend ? 65
 “ ‘ Judge, judge !’—breaks wavelike one whole foam of
 wrath.

“ Whereupon they, being friends and followers,
 “ Said ‘ Ay, thou art Christ’s Vicar, and not he !
 “ ‘ Away with what is frightful to behold !
 “ ‘ This act was uncanonic and a fault.’ 70

“ Then, swallowed up in rage, Stephen exclaimed
 “ ‘ So, guilty ! So, remains I punish guilt !
 “ ‘ He is unpoped, and all he did I damn :
 “ ‘ The Bishop, that ordained him, I degrade :
 “ ‘ Depose to laics those he raised to priests : 75
 “ ‘ What they have wrought is mischief nor shall stand,
 “ ‘ It is confusion, let it vex no more !

- “ ‘ Since I revoke, annul and abrogate
 “ ‘ All his decrees in all kinds : they are void !
 “ ‘ In token whereof and warning to the world, 80
 “ ‘ Strip me yon miscreant of those robes usurped,
 “ ‘ And clothe him with vile serge befitting such !
 “ ‘ Then hale the carrion to the market-place ;
 “ ‘ Let the town-hangman chop from his right hand 84
 “ ‘ Those same three fingers which he blessed withal ;
 “ ‘ Next cut the head off, once was crowned forsooth :
 “ ‘ And last go fling all, fingers, head and trunk,
 “ ‘ In Tiber that my Christian fish may sup !’
 “ —Either because of $\text{IX}\Theta\text{Υ}\Sigma$ which means Fish
 “ And very aptly symbolizes Christ, 90
 “ Or else because the Pope is Fisherman
 “ And seals with Fisher’s-signet. Anyway,
 “ So said, so done : himself, to see it done,
 “ Following the corpse, they trailed from street to street
 “ Till into Tiber wave they threw the thing. 95
 “ The people, crowded on the banks to see,
 “ Were loud or mute, wept or laughed, cursed or
 jeered,
 “ According as the deed addressed their sense ;
 “ A scandal verily : and out spake a Jew
 “ ‘ Wot ye your Christ had vexed our Herod thus ?’ 100

“ Now when, Formosus being dead a year,
 “ His judge Pope Stephen tasted death in turn,
 “ Made captive by the mob and strangled straight,
 “ Romanus, his successor for a month,
 “ Did make protest Formosus was with God, 105
 “ Holy, just, true in thought and word and deed.
 “ Next Theodore, who reigned but twenty days,
 “ Therein convoked a synod, whose decree
 “ Did reinstate, repope the late unpoped,
 “ And do away with Stephen as accursed. 110
 “ So that when presently certain fisher-folk
 “ (As if the queasy river could not hold
 “ Its swallowed Jonas, but discharged the meal)
 “ Produced the timely product of their nets,
 “ The mutilated man, Formosus,—saved 115
 “ From putrefaction by the embalmer’s spice,
 “ Or, as some said, by sanctity of flesh,—
 “ ‘ Why, lay the body again ’ bade Theodore
 “ ‘ Among his predecessors, in the church
 “ ‘ And burial-place of Peter ! ’ which was done. 120
 “ ‘ And ’ addeth Luitprand ‘ many of repute,
 “ ‘ Pious and still alive, avouch to me
 “ ‘ That as they bore the body up the aisle
 “ ‘ The saints in imaged row bowed each his head

- “ ‘ For welcome to a brother-saint come back.’ 125
 “ As for Romanus and this Theodore,
 “ These two Popes, through the brief reign granted each,
 “ Could but initiate what John came to close
 “ And give the final stamp to : he it was,
 “ Ninth of the name, (I follow the best guides) 130
 “ Who,—in full synod at Ravenna held
 “ With Bishops seventy-four, and present too
 “ Eude King of France with his Archbishopry,—
 “ Did condemn Stephen, anathematize
 “ The disinterment, and make all blots blank. 135
 “ ‘ For,’ argueth here Auxilius in a place
 “ *De Ordinationibus*, ‘ precedents
 “ ‘ Had been, no lack, before Formosus long,
 “ ‘ Of Bishops so transferred from see to see,—
 “ ‘ Marinus, for example ’ : read the tract. 140
 “ But, after John, came Sergius, reaffirmed
 “ The right of Stephen, cursed Formosus, nay
 “ Cast out, some say, his corpse a second time.
 “ And here,—because the matter went to ground,
 “ Fretted by new griefs, other cares of the age,— 145
 “ Here is the last pronouncing of the Church,
 “ Her sentence that subsists unto this day.

“ Yet constantly opinion hath prevailed
 “ I’ the Church, Formosus was a holy man.”

Which of the judgments was infallible? 150

Which of my predecessors spoke for God?

And what availed Formosus that this cursed,
 That blessed, and then this other cursed again?

“ Fear ye not those whose power can kill the body
 “ And not the soul,” saith Christ “ but rather those 155
 “ Can cast both soul and body into hell !”

John judged thus in Eight Hundred Ninety Eight,
 Exact eight hundred years ago to-day
 When, sitting in his stead, Vice-gerent here,
 I must give judgment on my own behoof. 160
 So worked the predecessor : now, my turn !

In God’s name ! Once more on this earth of God’s,
 While twilight lasts and time wherein to work,
 I take His staff with my uncertain hand,
 And stay my six and fourscore years, my due 165
 Labour and sorrow, on His judgment-seat,
 And forthwith think, speak, act, in place of Him—
 The Pope for Christ. Once more appeal is made

From man's assize to mine : I sit and see
 Another poor weak trembling human wretch 170
 Pushed by his fellows, who pretend the right,
 Up to the gulf which, where I gaze, begins
 From this world to the next,—gives way and way,
 Just on the edge over the awful dark :
 With nothing to arrest him but my feet. 175
 He catches at me with convulsive face,
 Cries " Leave to live the natural minute more !"
 While hollowly the avengers echo " Leave ?
 " None ! So has he exceeded man's due share
 " In man's fit licence, wrung by Adam's fall, 180
 " To sin and yet not surely die,—that we,
 " All of us sinful, all with need of grace,
 " All chary of our life,—the minute more
 " Or minute less of grace which saves a soul,—
 " Bound to make common cause with who craves time,
 " —We yet protest against the exorbitance 186
 " Of sin in this one sinner, and demand
 " That his poor sole remaining piece of time
 " Be plucked from out his clutch : put him to death !
 " Punish him now ! As for the weal or woe 190
 " Hereafter, God grant mercy ! Man be just,
 " Nor let the felon boast he went scot-free !"

And I am bound, the solitary judge,
 To weigh the worth, decide upon the plea,
 And either hold a hand out, or withdraw 195
 A foot and let the wretch drift to the fall.
 Ay, and while thus I dally, dare perchance
 Put fancies for a comfort 'twixt this calm
 And yonder passion that I have to bear,—
 As if reprieve were possible for both 200
 Prisoner and Pope,—how easy were reprieve !
 A touch o' the hand-bell here, a hasty word
 To those who wait, and wonder they wait long,
 I' the passage there, and I should gain the life !—
 Yea, though I flatter me with fancy thus, 205
 I know it is but nature's craven-trick.
 The case is over, judgment at an end,
 And all things done now and irrevocable :
 A mere dead man is Franceschini here,
 Even as Formosus centuries ago. 210
 I have worn through this sombre wintry day,
 With winter in my soul beyond the world's,
 Over these dismalest of documents
 Which drew night down on me ere eve befell,—
 Pleadings and counter-pleadings, figure of fact 215
 Beside fact's self, these summaries to-wit,—

How certain three were slain by certain five :
 I read here why it was, and how it went,
 And how the chief o' the five preferred excuse,
 And how law rather chose defence should lie,— 220
 What argument he urged by wary word
 When free to play off wile, start subterfuge,
 And what the unguarded groan told, torture's feat
 When law grew brutal, outbroke, overbore
 And glutted hunger on the truth, at last,— 225
 No matter for the flesh and blood between.
 All 's a clear rede and no more riddle now.
 Truth, nowhere, lies yet everywhere in these—
 Not absolutely in a portion, yet
 Evolvable from the whole : evolved at last 230
 Painfully, held tenaciously by me.
 Therefore there is not any doubt to clear
 When I shall write the brief word presently
 And chink the hand-bell, which I pause to do.
 Irresolute? Not I more than the mound 235
 With the pine-trees on it yonder! Some surmise,
 Perchance, that since man's wit is fallible,
 Mine may fail here? Suppose it so,—what then?
 Say,—Guido, I count guilty, there 's no babe
 So guiltless, for I misconceive the man! 240

What 's in the chance should move me from my mind ?
 If, as I walk in a rough country-side,
 Peasants of mine cry " Thou art he can help,
 " Lord of the land and counted wise to boot :
 " Look at our brother, strangling in his foam, 245
 " He fell so where we find him,—prove thy worth !"
 I may presume, pronounce, " A frenzy-fit,
 " A falling-sickness or a fever-stroke !
 " Breathe a vein, copiously let blood at once !"
 So perishes the patient, and anon 250
 I hear my peasants—" All was error, lord !
 " Our story, thy prescription : for there crawled
 " In due time from our hapless brother's breast
 " The serpent which had stung him : bleeding slew
 " Whom a prompt cordial had restored to health." 255
 What other should I say than " God so willed :
 " Mankind is ignorant, a man am I :
 " Call ignorance my sorrow not my sin !"
 So and not otherwise, in after-time,
 If some acuter wit, fresh probing, sound 260
 This multifarious mass of words and deeds
 Deeper, and reach through guilt to innocence,
 I shall face Guido's ghost nor blench a jot.
 " God who set me to judge thee, meted out

“ So much of judging faculty, no more : 265

“ Ask Him if I was slack in use thereof !”

I hold a heavier fault imputable

Inasmuch as I changed a chaplain once,

For no cause,—no, if I must bare my heart,—

Save that he snuffled somewhat saying mass. 270

For I am ware it is the seed of act,

God holds appraising in His hollow palm,

Not act grown great thence on the world below,

Leafage and branchage, vulgar eyes admire.

Therefore I stand on my integrity, 275

Nor fear at all : and if I hesitate,

It is because I need to breathe awhile,

Rest, as the human right allows, review

Intent the little seeds of act, the tree,—

The thought, to clothe in deed, and give the world 280

At chink of bell and push of arrased door.

O pale departure, dim disgrace of day !

Winter 's in wane, his vengeful worst art thou,

To dash the boldness of advancing March !

Thy chill persistent rain has purged our streets 285

Of gossipry ; pert tongue and idle ear

By this, consort 'neath archway, portico.

But wheresoe'er Rome 'gathers in the grey,
Two names now snap and flash from mouth to
mouth—

(Sparks, flint and steel strike) Guido and the Pope. 290

By this same hour to-morrow eve—aha,
How do they call him?—the sagacious Swede
Who finds by figures how the chances prove,
Why one comes rather than another thing,
As, say, such dots turn up by throw of dice, 295

Or, if we dip in Virgil here and there
And prick for such a verse, when such shall point.
Take this Swede, tell him, hiding name and rank,
Two men are in our city this dull eve ;
One doomed to death,—but hundreds in such plight
Slip aside, clean escape by leave of law 301
Which leans to mercy in this latter time ;

Moreover in the plenitude of life
Is he, with strength of limb and brain adroit,
Presumably of service here : beside, 305

The man is noble, backed by nobler friends :
Nay, for who wish him well, the city's self
Makes common cause with the house-magistrate,
The lord of hearth and home, domestic judge
Who ruled his own and let men cavil. Die? 310

He 'll bribe a gaoler or break prison first !
 Nay, a sedition may be helpful, give
 Hint to the mob to batter wall, burn gate,
 And bid the favourite malefactor march.
 Calculate now these chances of escape ! 315
 " It is not probable, but well may be."
 Again, there is another man, weighed now
 By twice eight years beyond the seven-times-ten,
 Appointed overweight to break our branch.
 And this man's loaded branch lifts, more than snow, 320
 All the world's cark and care, though a bird's nest
 Were a superfluous burthen : notably
 Hath he been pressed, as if his age were youth,
 From to-day's dawn till now that day departs,
 Trying one question with true sweat of soul 325
 " Shall the said doomed man fitlier die or live ?"
 When a straw swallowed in his posset, stool
 Stumbled on where his path lies, any puff
 That's incident to such a smoking flax,
 Hurries the natural end and quenches him ! 330
 Now calculate, thou sage, the chances here,
 Say, which shall die the sooner, this or that ?
 " That, possibly, this in all likelihood."
 I thought so : yet thou tripp'st, my foreign friend !

No, it will be quite otherwise,—to-day 335
 Is Guido's last : my term is yet to run.

But say the Swede were right, and I forthwith
 Acknowledge a prompt summons and lie dead :
 Why, then I stand already in God's face,
 And hear " Since by its fruit a tree is judged, 340
 " Show me thy fruit, the latest act of thine !
 " For in the last is summed the first and all,—
 " What thy life last put heart and soul into,
 " There shall I taste thy product." I must plead
 This condemnation of a man to-day. 345

Not so ! Expect nor question nor reply
 At what we figure as God's judgment-bar !
 None of this vile way by the barren words
 Which, more than any deed, characterize
 Man as made subject to a curse : no speech— 350
 That still bursts o'er some lie which lurks inside,
 As the split skin across the coppery snake,
 And most denotes man ! since, in all beside,
 In hate or lust or guile or unbelief,
 Out of some core of truth the excrescence comes, 355
 And, in the last resort, the man may urge

" So was I made, a weak thing that gave way
 " To truth, to impulse only strong since true,
 " And hated, lusted, used guile, forwent faith."
 But when man walks the garden of this world 360
 For his own solace, and, unchecked by law,
 Speaks or keeps silence as himself sees fit,
 Without the least incumbency to lie,
 —Why, can he tell you what a rose is like,
 Or how the birds fly, and not slip to false 365
 Though truth serve better? Man must tell his mate
 Of you, me and himself, knowing he lies,
 Knowing his fellow knows the same,—will think
 " He lies, it is the method of a man!"
 And yet will speak for answer "It is truth" 370
 To him who shall rejoin "Again a lie!"
 Therefore this filthy rags of speech, this coil
 Of statement, comment, query and response,
 Tatters all too contaminate for use,
 Have no renewing: He, the Truth, is, too, 375
 The Word. We men, in our degree, may know
 There, simply, instantaneously, as here
 After long time and amid many lies,
 Whatever we dare think we know indeed
 —That I am I, as He is He,—what else? 380

But be man's method for man's life at least !
 Wherefore, Antonio Pignatelli, thou
 My ancient self, who wast no Pope so long
 But studied God and man, the many years
 I' the school, i' the cloister, in the diocese 385
 Domestic, legate-rule in foreign lands,—
 Thou other force in those old busy days
 Than this grey ultimate decrepitude,—
 Yet sensible of fires that more and more
 Visit a soul, in passage to the sky, 390
 Left nakeder than when flesh-robe was new—
 Thou, not Pope but the mere old man o' the world,
 Supposed inquisitive and dispassionate,
 Wilt thou, the one whose speech I somewhat trust,
 Question the after-me, this self now Pope, 395
 Hear his procedure, criticize his work ?
 Wise in its generation is the world.

This is why Guido is found reprobate.
 I see him furnished forth for his career,
 On starting for the life-chance in our world, 400
 With nearly all we count sufficient help :
 Body and mind in balance, a sound frame,
 A solid intellect : the wit to seek,

Wisdom to choose, and courage wherewithal
 To deal with whatsoever circumstance 405
 Should minister to man, make life succeed.
 Oh, and much drawback ! what were earth without ?
 Is this our ultimate stage, or starting-place
 To try man's foot, if it will creep or climb,
 'Mid obstacles in seeming, points that prove 410
 Advantage for who vaults from low to high
 And makes the stumbling-block a stepping-stone ?
 So, Guido, born with appetite, lacks food,
 Is poor, who yet could deftly play-off wealth,
 Straited, whose limbs are restless till at large : 415
 And, as he eyes each outlet of the cirque,
 The narrow penfold for probation, pines
 After the good things just outside the grate,
 With less monition, fainter conscience-twitch,
 Rarer instinctive qualm at the first feel 420
 Of the unseemly greed and grasp undue,
 Than nature furnishes the main mankind,—
 Making it harder to do wrong than right
 The first time, careful lest the common ear
 Break measure, miss the outstep of life's march. 425
 Wherein I see a trial fair and fit
 For one else too unfairly fenced about,

Set above sin, beyond his fellows here,
 Guarded from the arch-tempter, all must fight,
 By a great birth, traditionary name, 430
 Diligent culture, choice companionship,
 Above all, conversancy with the faith
 Which puts forth for its base of doctrine just
 "Man is born nowise to content himself
 "But please God." He accepted such a rule, 435
 Recognized man's obedience; and the Church,
 Which simply is such rule's embodiment,
 He clave to, he held on by,—nay, indeed,
 Near pushed inside of, deep as layman durst,
 Professed so much of priesthood as might sue 440
 For priest's-exemption where the layman sinned,—
 Got his arm frocked which, bare, the law would
 bruise.

Hence, at this moment, what 's his last resource,
 His extreme stay and utmost stretch of hope
 But that,—convicted of such crime as law 445
 Wipes not away save with a worldling's blood,—
 Guido, the three-parts consecrate, may 'scape?
 Nay, the portentous brothers of the man
 Are veritably priests, protected each
 May do his murder in the Church's pale, 450

Abate Paul, Canon Girolamo !
This is the man proves irreligiousest
Of all mankind, religion's parasite !
This may forsooth plead dinned ear, jaded sense,
The vice o' the watcher who bides near the bell, 455
Sleeps sound because the clock is vigilant,
And cares not whether it be shade or shine,
Doling out day and night to all men else !
Why was the choice o' the man to niche himself
Perversely 'neath the tower where Time's own tongue
Thus undertakes to sermonize the world ? 461
Why, but because the solemn is safe too,
The belfry proves a fortress of a sort,
Has other uses than to teach the hour,
Turns sunscreen, paravent and ombrifuge 465
To whoso seeks a shelter in its pale,
—Ay, and attractive to unwary folk
Who gaze at storied portal, statued spire,
And go home with full head but empty purse
Nor dare suspect the sacristan the thief ! 470
Shall Judas,—hard upon the donor's heel,
To filch the fragments of the basket,—plead
He was too near the preacher's mouth, nor sat
Attent with fifties in a company ?

No,—closer to promulgated decree, 475
Clearer the censure of default. Proceed !

I find him bound, then, to begin life well ;
Fortified by propitious circumstance,
Great birth, good breeding, with the Church for guide.
How lives he ? Cased thus in a coat of proof, 480
Mailed like a man-at-arms, though all the while
A puny starveling,—does the breast pant big,
The limb swell to the limit, emptiness
Strive to become solidity indeed ?
Rather, he shrinks up like the ambiguous fish, 485
Detaches flesh from shell and outside show,
And steals by moonlight (I have seen the thing)
In and out, now to prey and now to skulk.
Armour he boasts when a wave breaks on beach,
Or bird stoops for the prize : with peril nigh,— 490
The man of rank, the much-befriended man,
The man almost affiliate to the Church,
Such is to deal with, let the world beware !
Does the world recognize, pass prudently ?
Do tides abate and sea-fowl hunt i' the deep ? 495
Already is the slug from out its mew,
Ignobly faring with all loose and free,

Sand-fly and slush-worm at their garbage-feast,
 A naked blotch no better than they all :
 Guido has dropped nobility, slipped the Church, 500
 Plays trickster if not cut-purse, body and soul
 Prostrate among the filthy feeders—faugh !
 And when Law takes him by surprise at last,
 Catches the foul thing on its carrion-prey,
 Behold, he points to shell left high and dry, 505
 Pleads “ But the case out yonder is myself ! ”
 Nay, it is thou, Law prongs amid thy peers,
 Congenial vermin ; that was none of thee,
 Thine outside,—give it to the soldier-crab !

For I find this black mark impinge the man, 510
 That he believes in just the vile of life.
 Low instinct, base pretension, are these truth ?
 Then, that aforesaid armour, probity
 He figures in, is falsehood scale on scale ;
 Honor and faith,—a lie and a disguise, 515
 Probably for all livers in this world,
 Certainly for himself ! All say good words
 To who will hear, all do thereby bad deeds
 To who must undergo ; so thrive mankind !
 See this habitual creed exemplified 520

Most in the last deliberate act ; as last,
 So, very sum and substance of the soul
 Of him that planned and leaves one perfect piece,
 The sin brought under jurisdiction now,
 Even the marriage of the man : this act 525
 I sever from his life as sample, show
 For Guido's self, intend to test him by,
 As, from a cup filled fairly at the fount,
 By the components we decide enough
 Or to let flow as late, or staunch the source. 530

He purposes this marriage, I remark,
 On no one motive that should prompt thereto—
 Farthest, by consequence, from ends alleged
 Appropriate to the action ; so they were :
 The best, he knew and feigned, the worst he took. 536
 Not one permissible impulse moves the man,
 From the mere liking of the eye and ear,
 To the true longing of the heart that loves,
 No trace of these : but all to instigate,
 Is what sinks man past level of the brute, 540
 Whose appetite if brutish is a truth.
 All is the lust for money : to get gold,—
 Why, lie, rob, if it must be, murder ! Make

Body and soul wring gold out, lured within
The clutch of hate by love, the trap's pretence ! 545
What good else get from bodies and from souls ?
This got, there were some life to lead thereby,
—What, where or how, appreciate those who tell
How the toad lives : it lives,—enough for me !
To get this good,—with but a groan or so, 550
Then, silence of the victims,—were the feat.
He foresaw, made a picture in his mind,—
Of father and mother stunned and echoless
To the blow, as they lie staring at fate's jaws
Their folly danced into, till the woe fell ; 555
Edged in a month by strenuous cruelty
From even the poor nook whence they watched the wolf
Feast on their heart, the lamb-like child his prey ;
Plundered to the last remnant of their wealth,
(What daily pittance pleased the plunderer dole) 560
Hunted forth to go hide head, starve and die,
So leave the pale awe-stricken wife, past hope
Of help i' the world now, mute and motionless,
His slave, his chattel, to use and then destroy :
All this, he bent mind how to bring about, 565
Put this in act and life, as painted plain,
And have success, the crown of earthly good,

In this particular enterprise of man,
 A marriage—undertaken in God's face
 With all those lies so opposite God's truth, 570
 For ends so other than man's end.

Thus schemes

Guido, and thus would carry out his scheme :
 But when an obstacle first blocks the path,
 When he finds there is no monopoly 575
 Of lies and trick i' the tricking lying world,—
 That sorry timid natures, even this sort
 O' the Comparini, want nor trick nor lie
 Proper to the kind,—that as the gor-crow treats
 The bramble-finch so treats the finch the moth, 580
 And the great Guido is minutely matched
 By this same couple,—whether true or false
 The revelation of Pompilia's birth,
 Which in a moment brings his scheme to nought,—
 Then, he is piqued, advances yet a stage, 585
 Leaves the low region to the finch and fly,
 Soars to the zenith whence the fiercer fowl
 May dare the inimitable swoop. I see.
 He draws now on the curious crime, the fine
 Felicity and flower of wickedness ; 590

Determines, by the utmost exercise
Of violence, made safe and sure by craft,
To satiate malice, pluck one last arch-pang
From the parents, else would triumph out of reach,
By punishing their child, within reach yet, 595
Who nowise could have wronged, thought, word or deed,
I' the matter that now moves him. So plans he,
Always subordinating (note the point !)
Revenge, the manlier sin, to interest
The meaner,—would pluck pang forth, but unclench
No gripe in the act, let fall no money-piece. 601
Hence a plan for so plaguing, body and soul,
His wife, so putting, day by day and hour by hour,
The untried torture to the untouched place,
As must precipitate an end foreseen, 605
Goad her into some plain revolt, most like
Plunge upon patent suicidal shame,
Death to herself, damnation by rebound
To those whose hearts he, holding hers, holds still :
Such a plan as, in its completeness, shall 610
Ruin the three together and alike,
Yet leave himself in luck and liberty,
No claim renounced, no right a forfeiture,
His person unendangered, his good fame

Without a flaw, his pristine worth intact,— 615
While they, with all their claims and rights that cling,
Shall forthwith crumble off him every side,
Scorched into dust, a plaything for the winds.
As when, in our Campagna, there is fired
The nest-like work that lets a peasant house ; 620
And, as the thatch burns here, there, everywhere,
Even to the ivy and wild vine, that bound
And blessed the hut where men were happy once,
There rises gradual, black amid the blaze,
Some grim and unscathed nucleus of the nest,— 625
Some old malicious tower, some obscene tomb
They thought a temple in their ignorance,
And clung about and thought to lean upon—
There laughs it o'er their ravage,—where are they?
So did his cruelty burn life about, 630
And lay the ruin bare in dreadfulnes,
Try the persistency of torment so
O' the wife, that, at some fierce extremity,
Some crisis brought about by fire and flame,
The patient stung to frenzy should break loose, 635
Fly anyhow, find refuge anywhere,
Even in the arms of who might front her first,
No monster but a man—while nature shrieked

“ Or thus escape, or die ! ” The spasm arrived,
Not the escape by way of sin,—O God, 640
Who shall pluck sheep Thou holdest, from Thy hand ?
Therefore she lay resigned to die,—so far
The simple cruelty was foiled. Why then,
Craft to the rescue, craft should supplement
Cruelty and show hell a masterpiece ! 645
Hence this consummate lie, this love-intrigue,
Unmanly simulation of a sin,
With place and time and circumstance to suit—
These letters false beyond all forgery—
Not just handwriting and mere authorship, 650
But false to body and soul they figure forth—
As though the man had cut out shape and shape
From fancies of that other Aretine,
To paste below—incorporate the filth
With cherub faces on a missal-page ! 655

Whereby the man so far attains his end
That strange temptation is permitted,—see !
Pompilia, wife, and Caponsacchi, priest,
Are brought together as nor priest nor wife
Should stand, and there is passion in the place, 660
Power in the air for evil as for good,

Promptings from heaven and hell, as if the stars
 Fought in their courses for a fate to be.
 Thus stand the wife and priest, a spectacle,
 I doubt not, to unseen assemblage there. 665
 No lamp will mark that window for a shrine,
 No tablet signalize the terrace, teach
 New generations which succeed the old,
 The pavement of the street is holy ground ;
 No bard describe in verse how Christ prevailed 670
 And Satan fell like lightning ! Why repine ?
 What does the world, told truth, but lie the more ?

A second time the plot is foiled ; nor, now,
 By corresponding sin for countercheck,
 No wile and trick to baffle trick and wile,— 675
 The play of the parents ! Here the blot is blanced
 By God's gift of a purity of soul
 That will not take pollution, ermine-like
 Armed from dishonour by its own soft snow.
 Such was this gift of God who showed for once 680
 How He would have the world go white : it seems
 As a new attribute were born of each
 Champion of truth, the priest and wife I praise,—
 As a new safeguard sprang up in defence

Of their new noble nature : so a thorn 685
 Comes to the aid of and completes the rose—
 Courage to-wit, no woman's gift nor priest's,
 I' the crisis ; might leaps vindicating right.
 See how the strong aggressor, bad and bold,
 With every vantage, preconcerts surprise, 690
 Flies of a sudden at his victim's throat
 In a byeway,—how fares he when face to face
 With Caponsacchi? Who fights, who fears now?
 There quails Count Guido, armed to the chattering teeth,
 Cowers at the steadfast eye and quiet word 695
 O' the Canon at the Pieve ! 'There skulks crime
 Behind law called in to back cowardice !
 While out of the poor trampled worm the wife,
 Springs up a serpent !

But anon of these ! 700

Him I judge now,—of him proceed to note,
 Failing the first, a second chance befriends
 Guido, gives pause ere punishment arrive.
 The law he called, comes, hears, adjudicates,
 Nor does amiss i' the main,—secludes the wife 705
 From the husband, respites the oppressed one, grants
 Probation to the oppressor, could he know

The mercy of a minute's fiery purge !
 The furnace-coals alike of public scorn,
 Private remorse, heaped glowing on his head, 710
 What if,—the force and guile, the ore's alloy,
 Eliminate, his baser soul refined—
 The lost be saved even yet, so as by fire ?
 Let him, rebuked, go softly all his days
 And, when no graver musings claim their due, 715
 Meditate on a man's immense mistake
 Who, fashioned to use feet and walk, deigns crawl—
 Takes the unmanly means—ay, though to end
 Man scarce should make for, would but reach thro'
 wrong,—
 May sin, but must not needs shame manhood so : 720
 Since fowlers hawk, shoot, nay and snare the game,
 And yet eschew vile practice, nor find sport
 In torch-light treachery or the luring owl.

But how hunts Guido ? Why, the fraudulent trap—
 Late spurned to ruin by the indignant feet 725
 Of fellows in the chase who loved fair play—
 Here he picks up the fragments to the least,
 Lades him and hies to the old lurking-place
 Where haply he may patch again, refit

The mischief, file its blunted teeth anew, 730
 Make sure, next time, a snap shall break the bone.
 Craft, greed and violence complot revenge :
 Craft, for its quota, schemes to bring about
 And seize occasion and be safe withal :
 Greed craves its act may work both far and near, 735
 Crush the tree, branch and trunk and root beside,
 Whichever twig or leaf arrests a streak
 Of possible sunshine else would coin itself,
 And drop down one more gold piece in the path.
 Violence stipulates " Advantage proved, 740
 " And safety sure, be pain the overplus !
 " Murder with jagged knife ! Cut but tear too !
 " Foiled oft, starved long, glut malice for amends !"
 And, last, craft schemes,—scheme sorrowful and strange
 As though the elements, whom mercy checked, 745
 Had mustered hate for one eruption more,
 One final deluge to surprise the Ark
 Cradled and sleeping on its mountain-top :
 The outbreak-signal—what but the dove's coos
 Back with the olive in her bill for news 750
 Sorrow was over ? 'T is an infant's birth,
 Guido's first born, his son and heir, that gives
 The occasion : other men cut free their souls

From care in such a case, fly up in thanks
 To God, reach, recognise His love for once : 755
 Guido cries " Soul, at last the mire is thine !
 " Lie there in likeness of a money-bag,
 " This babe's birth so pins down past moving now,
 " That I dare cut adrift the lives I late
 " Scrupled to touch lest thou escape with them ! 760
 " These parents and their child my wife,—touch one
 " Lose all ! Their rights determined on a head
 " I could but hate, not harm, since from each hair
 " Dangled a hope for me : now—chance and change !
 " No right was in their child but passes now 765
 " To that child's child and through such child to me.
 " I am the father now,—come what, come will,
 " I represent my child ; he comes between—
 " Cuts sudden off the sunshine of this life
 " From those three : why, the gold is in his curls ! 770
 " Not with old Pietro's, Violante's head,
 " Not his' grey horror, her more hideous black—
 " Go these, devoted to the knife ! "

'T is done :

Wherefore should mind misgive, heart hesitate ? 775
 He calls to counsel, fashions certain four
 Colourless natures counted clean till now,

—Rustic simplicity, uncorrupted youth,
 Ignorant virtue! Here's the gold o' the prime
 When Saturn ruled, shall shock our leaden day— 780
 The clown abash the courtier! Mark it, bards!
 The courtier tries his hand on clownship here,
 Speaks a word, names a crime, appoints a price,—
 Just breathes on what, suffused with all himself,
 Is red-hot henceforth past distinction now 785
 I' the common glow of hell. And thus they break
 And blaze on us at Rome, Christ's Birthnight-eve!
 Oh angels that sang erst "On the earth, peace!
 "To man, good will!"—such peace finds earth to-day!
 After the seventeen hundred years, so man 790
 Wills good to man, so Guido makes complete
 His murder! what is it I said?—cuts loose
 Three lives that hitherto he suffered cling,
 Simply because each served to nail secure,
 By a corner of the money-bag, his soul,— 795
 Therefore, lives sacred till the babe's first breath
 O'erweights them in the balance,—off they fly!

So is the murder managed, sin conceived
 To the full: and why not crowned with triumph too?
 Why must the sin, conceived thus, bring forth death?

I note how, within hair's-breadth of escape, 801
 Impunity and the thing supposed success,
 Guido is found when the check comes, the change,
 The monitory touch o' the tether—felt
 By few, not marked by many, named by none 805
 At the moment, only recognised aright
 I' the fulness of the days, for God's, lest sin
 Exceed the service, leap the line : such check—
 A secret which this life finds hard to keep,
 And, often guessed, is never quite revealed. 810
 Guido must needs trip on a stumbling-block
 Too vulgar, too absurdly plain i' the path !
 Study this single oversight of care,
 This hebetude that mars sagacity,
 Forgetfulness of what the man best knew ! 815
 Here is a stranger who, with need to fly,
 Needs but to ask and have the means of flight.
 Why, the first urchin tells you, to leave Rome,
 Get horses, you must show the warrant, just
 The banal scrap, clerk's scribble, a fair word buys, 820
 Or foul one, if a ducat sweeten word,—
 And straight authority will back demand,
 Give you the pick o' the post-house !—in such wise,
 The resident at Rome for thirty years,

Guido, instructs a stranger ! And himself 825
Forgets just this poor paper scrap, wherewith
Armed, every door he knocks at opens wide
To save him : horsed and manned, with such advance
O' the hunt behind, why 't were the easy task
Of hours told on the fingers of one hand, 830
To reach the Tuscan Frontier, laugh at home,
Light-hearted with his fellows of the place,—
Prepared by that strange shameful judgment, that
Satire upon a sentence just pronounced
By the Rota and confirmed by the Granduke,— 835
Ready in a circle to receive their peer,
Appreciate his good story how, when Rome,
The Pope-King and the populace of priests
Made common cause with their confederate
The other priestling who seduced his wife, 840
He, all unaided, wiped out the affront
With decent bloodshed and could face his friends,
Frolic it in the world's eye. Ay, such tale
Missed such applause, all by such oversight !
So, tired and footsore, those blood-flustered five 845
Went reeling on the road through dark and cold,
The few permissible miles, to sink at length,
Wallow and sleep in the first wayside straw,

As the other herd quenched, i' the wash o' the wave,
 —Each swine, the devil inside him : so slept they, 850
 And so were caught and caged—all through one trip,
 Touch of the fool in Guido the astute !

He curses the omission, I surmise,
 More than the murder. Why, thou fool and blind,
 It is the mercy-stroke that stops thy fate, 855

Hamstrings and holds thee to thy hurt,—but how ?

On the edge o' the precipice ! One minute more,
 Thou hadst gone farther and fared worse, my son,
 Fathoms down on the flint and fire beneath !

Thy comrades each and all were of one mind 860

Straightway, thy murder done, to murder thee

In turn, because of promised pay withheld.

So, to the last, greed found itself at odds

With craft in thee, and, proving conqueror,

Had sent thee, the same night that crowned thy hope,

Thither where, this same day, I see thee not, 866

Nor, through God's mercy, need, to-morrow, see.

Such I find Guido, midmost blotch of black

Discernible in this group of clustered crimes

Huddling together in the cave they call 870

Their palace, outraged day thus penetrates.

Around him ranged, now close and now remote,
Prominent or obscure to meet the needs
O' the mage and master, I detect each shape
Subsidiary i' the scene nor loathed the less, 875
All alike coloured, all descried akin
By one and the same pitchy furnace stirred
At the centre : see, they lick the master's hand,—
This fox-faced horrible priest, this brother-brute
The Abate,—why, mere wolfishness looks well, 880
Guido stands honest in the red o' the flame,
Beside this yellow that would pass for white,
This Guido, all craft but no violence,
This copier of the mien and gait and garb
Of Peter and Paul, that he may go disguised, 885
Rob halt and lame, sick folk i' the temple-porch !
Armed with religion, fortified by law,
A man of peace, who trims the midnight lamp
And turns the classic page—and all for craft,
All to work harm with, yet incur no scratch ! 890
While Guido brings the struggle to a close,
Paul steps back the due distance, clear o' the trap
He builds and baits. Guido I catch and judge ;
Paul is past reach in this world and my time :
That is a case reserved. Pass to the next, 895

The boy of the brood, the young Girolamo
 Priest, Canon, and what more? nor wolf nor fox,
 But hybrid, neither craft nor violence
 Wholly, part violence part craft: such cross
 Tempts speculation—will both blend one day, 900
 And prove hell's better product? Or subside
 And let the simple quality emerge,
 Go on with Satan's service the old way?
 Meanwhile, what promise,—what performance too!
 For there's a new distinctive touch, I see, 905
 Lust—lacking in the two—hell's own blue tint
 That gives a character and marks the man
 More than a match for yellow and red. Once more,
 A case reserved: why should I doubt? Then comes
 The gaunt grey nightmare in the furthest smoke, 910
 The hag that gave these three abortions birth,
 Unmotherly mother and unwomanly
 Woman, that near turns motherhood to shame,
 Womanliness to loathing: no one word,
 No gesture to curb cruelty a whit 915
 More than the she-pard thwarts her playsome whelps
 Trying their milk-teeth on the soft o' the throat
 O' the first fawn, flung, with those beseeching eyes,
 Flat in the covert! How should she but couch,

Lick the dry lips, unsheathe the blunted claw, 920
 Catch 'twixt her placid eyewinks at what chance
 Old bloody half-forgotten dream may flit,
 Born when herself was novice to the taste,
 The while she lets youth take its pleasure. Last,
 These God-abandoned wretched lumps of life, 925
 These four companions,—country-folk this time,
 Not tainted by the unwholesome civic breath,
 Much less the curse o' the court! Mere striplings too,
 Fit to do human nature justice still!
 Surely when impudence in Guido's shape 930
 Shall propose crime and proffer money's-worth
 To these stout tall bright-eyed and black-haired boys,
 The blood shall bound in answer to each cheek
 Before the indignant outcry break from lip!
 Are these i' the mood to murder, hardly loosed 935
 From healthy autumn-finish, the ploughed glebe,
 Grapes in the barrel, work at happy end,
 And winter come with rest and Christmas play?
 How greet they Guido with his final task—
 (As if he but proposed "One vineyard more 940
 "To dig, ere frost come, then relax indeed!")
 "Anywhere, anyhow and anywhy,
 "Murder me some three people, old and young,

"Ye never heard the names of,—and be paid.
 "So much!" And the whole four accede at once. 945
 Demur? As cattle would, bid march or halt!
 Is it some lingering habit, old fond faith
 I' the lord of the land, instructs them,—birthright-badge
 Of feudal tenure claims its slaves again?
 Not so at all, thou noble human heart! 950
 All is done purely for the pay,—which, earned,
 And not forthcoming at the instant, makes
 Religion heresy, and the lord o' the land
 Fit subject for a murder in his turn.
 The patron with cut throat and rifled purse, 955
 Deposited i' the roadside-ditch, his due,
 Nought hinders each good fellow trudging home,
 The heavier by a piece or two in poke,
 And so with new zest to the common life,
 Mattock and spade, plough-tail and waggon-shaft, 960
 Till some such other piece of luck betide,
 Who knows? Since this is a mere start in life,
 And none of them exceeds the twentieth year.

 Nay, more i' the background, yet? Unnoticed forms
 Claim to be classed, subordinately vile? 965
 Complacent lookers-on that laugh,—perchance

Shake head as their friend's horse-play grows too rough
With the mere child he manages amiss—
But would not interfere and make bad worse
For twice the fractious tears and prayers : thou know'st
Civility better, Marzi-Medici, 971
Governor for thy kinsman the Granduke !
Fit representative of law, man's lamp
I' the magistrate's grasp full-flare, no rushlight-end
Sputtering 'twixt thumb and finger of the priest ! 975
Whose answer to these Comparini's cry
Is a threat,—whose remedy of Pompilia's wrong
A shrug o' the shoulder, a facetious word
Or wink, traditional with Tuscan wits,
To Guido in the doorway. Laud to law ! 980
The wife is pushed back to the husband, he
Who knows how these home-squabblings persecute
People who have the public good to mind,
And work best with a silence in the court !
Ah, but I save my word at least for thee, 985
Archbishop, who art under me in the Church,
As I am under God,—thou, chosen by both
To do the shepherd's office, feed the sheep—
How of this lamb that panted at thy foot

While the wolf pressed on her within crook's reach ? 990
 Wast thou the hireling that did turn and flee ?
 With thee at least anon the little word !

Such denizens o' the cave now cluster round
 And heat the furnace sevenfold : time indeed
 A bolt from heaven should cleave roof and clear place,
 Transfix and show the world, suspiring flame, 996
 The main offender, scar and brand the rest
 Hurrying, each miscreant to his hole : then flood
 And purify the scene with outside day—
 Which yet, in the absolutest drench of dark, 1000
 Ne'er wants a witness, some stray beauty-beam
 To the despair of hell.

First of the first,

Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now
 Perfect in whiteness—stoop thou down, my child, 1005
 Give one good moment to the poor old Pope
 Heart-sick at having all his world to blame—
 Let me look at thee in the flesh as erst,
 Let me enjoy the old clean linen garb, 1009
 Not the new splendid vesture ! Armed and crowned,
 Would Michael, yonder, be, nor crowned nor armed,

The less pre-eminent angel? Everywhere
 I see in the world the intellect of man,
 That sword, the energy his subtle spear,
 The knowledge which defends him like a shield— 1015
 Everywhere; but they make not up, I think,
 The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower
 She holds up to the softened gaze of God!
 It was not given Pompilia to know much,
 Speak much, to write a book, to move mankind, 1020
 Be memorized by who records my time.
 Yet if in purity and patience, if
 In faith held fast despite the plucking fiend,
 Safe like the signet-stone with the new name
 That saints are known by,—if in right returned 1025
 For wrong, most pardon for worst injury,
 If there be any virtue, any praise,—
 Then will this woman-child have proved—who knows?—
 Just the one prize vouchsafed unworthy me,
 Ten years a gardener of the untoward ground, 1030
 I till,—this earth, my sweat and blood manure
 All the long day that barrenly grows dusk:
 At least one blossom makes me proud at eve
 Born 'mid the briers of my enclosure! Still
 (Oh, here as elsewhere, nothingness of man!) 1035

Those be the plants; imbedded yonder South
 To mellow in the morning, those made fat
 By the master's eye, that yield such timid leaf,
 Uncertain bud, as product of his pains !
 While—see how this mere chance-sown, cleft-nursed seed,
 That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot 1041
 Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze,
 Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
 To incorporate the whole great sun it loves
 From the inch-height whence it looks and longs! My
 flower, 1045
 My rose, I gather for the breast of God,
 This I praise most in thee, where all I praise,
 That having been obedient to the end
 According to the light allotted, law
 Prescribed thy life, still tried, still standing test,— 1050
 Dutiful to the foolish parents first,
 Submissive next to the bad husband,—nay,
 Tolerant of those meaner miserable
 That did his hests, eked out the dole of pain,—
 Thou, patient thus, couldst rise from law to law, 1055
 The old to the new, promoted at one cry
 O' the trump of God to the new service, not
 To longer bear, but henceforth fight, be found

Sublime in new impatience with the foe !
Endure man and obey God : plant firm foot 1060
On neck of man, tread man into the hell
Meet for him, and obey God all the more !
Oh child that didst despise thy life so much
When it seemed only thine to keep or lose,
How the fine ear felt fall the first low word 1065
“ Value life, and preserve life for My sake ! ”
Thou didst . . how shall I say ? . . receive so long
The standing ordinance of God on earth,
What wonder if the novel claim had clashed
With old requirement, seemed to supersede 1070
Too much the customary law ? But, brave,
Thou at first prompting of what I call God,
And fools call Nature, didst hear, comprehend,
Accept the obligation laid on thee,
Mother elect, to save the unborn child, 1075
As brute and bird do, reptile and the fly,
Ay and, I nothing doubt, even tree, shrub, plant
And flower o’ the field, all in a common pact
To worthily defend that trust of trusts,
Life from the Ever Living :—didst resist— 1080
Anticipate the office that is mine—
And with his own sword stay the upraised arm,

The endeavour of the wicked, and defend
 Him who,—again in my default,—was there
 For visible providence : one less true than thou 1085
 To touch, i' the past, less practised in the right,
 Approved so far in all docility
 To all instruction,—how had such an one
 Made scruple “ Is this motion a decree ? ”
 It was authentic to the experienced ear 1090
 O' the good and faithful servant. Go past me
 And get thy praise,—and be not far to seek
 Presently when I follow if I may !

And surely not so very much apart
 Need I place thee, my warrior-priest,—in whom 1095
 What if I gain the other rose, the gold,
 We grave to imitate God's miracle,
 Greet monarchs with, good rose in its degree ?
 Irregular noble scapegrace—son the same !
 Faulty—and peradventure ours the fault 1100
 Who still misteach, mislead, throw hook and line
 Thinking to land leviathan forsooth,
 Tame the scaled neck, play with him as a bird,
 And bind him for our maidens ! Better bear
 The King of Pride go wantoning awhile, 1105

Unplagued by cord in nose and thorn in jaw,
 Through deep to deep, followed by all that shine,
 Churning the blackness hoary : He who made
 The comely terror, He shall make the sword
 To match that piece of netherstone his heart, 1110
 Ay, nor miss praise thereby ; who else shut fire
 I' the stone, to leap from mouth at sword's first stroke,
 In lamps of love and faith, the chivalry
 That dares the right and disregards alike
 The yea and nay o' the world? Self-sacrifice,— 1115
 What if an idol took it? Ask the Church
 Why she was wont to turn each Venus here,—
 Poor Rome perversely lingered round, despite
 Instruction, for the sake of purblind love,—
 Into Madonna's shape, and waste no whit 1120
 Of aught so rare on earth as gratitude !
 All this sweet savour was not ours but thine,
 Nard of the rock, a natural wealth we name
 Incense, and treasure up as food for saints,
 When flung to us—whose function was to give 1125
 Not find the costly perfume. Do I smile?
 Nay, Caponsacchi, much I find amiss,
 Blameworthy, punishable in this freak
 Of thine, this youth prolonged though age was ripe,

This masquerade in sober day, with change 1130
Of motley too,—now hypocrite's-disguise,
Now fool's-costume : which lie was least like truth,
Which the ungainlier, more discordant garb
With that symmetric soul inside my son,
The churchman's or the worlding's,—let him judge, 1135
Our Adversary who enjoys the task !
I rather chronicle the healthy rage,—
When the first moan broke from the martyr-maid
At that uncaging of the beasts,—made bare
My athlete on the instant, gave such good 1140
Great undisguised leap over post and pale
Right into the mid-cirque, free fighting-place.
There may have been rash stripping—every rag
Went to the winds,—infringement manifold
Of laws prescribed pudicity, I fear, 1145
In this impulsive and prompt self-display !
Ever such tax comes of the foolish youth ;
Men mulct the wiser manhood, and suspect
No veritable star swims out of cloud :
•Bear thou such imputation, undergo 1150
The penalty I nowise dare relax,—
Conventional chastisement and rebuke.
But for the outcome, the brave starry birth

Conciliating earth with all that cloud,
 Thank heaven as I do ! Ay, such championship 1155
 Of God at first blush, such prompt cheery thud
 Of glove on ground that answers ringingly
 The challenge of the false knight,—watch we long,
 And wait we vainly for its gallant like
 From those appointed to the service, sworn 1160
 His body-guard with pay and privilege—
 White-cinct, because in white walks sanctity,
 Red-socked, how else proclaim fine scorn of flesh,
 Unchariness of blood when blood faith begs ?
 Where are the men-at-arms with cross on coat ? 1165
 Aloof, bewraying their attire : whilst thou
 In mask and motley, pledged to dance not fight,
 Sprang'st forth the hero ! In thought, word and deed,
 How throughout all thy warfare thou wast pure,
 I find it easy to believe : and if 1170
 At any fateful moment of the strange
 Adventure, the strong passion of that strait,
 Fear and surprise, may have revealed too much,—
 As when a thundrous midnight, with black air
 That burns, rain-drops that blister, breaks a spell, 1175
 Draws out the excessive virtue of some sheathed
 Shut unsuspected flower that hoards and hides

Immensity of sweetness,—so, perchance,
 Might the surprise and fear release too much.
 The perfect beauty of the body and soul 1180
 Thou savedst in thy passion for God's sake,
 He who is Pity : was the trial sore ?
 Temptation sharp ? Thank God a second time !
 Why comes temptation but for man to meet
 And master and make crouch beneath his foot, 1185
 And so be pedestalled in triumph ? Pray
 “ Lead us into no such temptations, Lord ! ”
 Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold,
 Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
 Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight, 1190
 That so he may do battle and have praise !
 Do I not see the praise ?—that while thy mates
 Bound to deserve i' the matter, prove at need
 Unprofitable through the very pains
 We gave to train them well and start them fair,— 1195
 Are found too stiff, with standing ranked and ranged,
 For onset in good earnest, too obtuse
 Of ear, through iteration of command,
 For catching quick the sense of the real cry,—
 Thou, whose sword-hand was used to strike the lute,
 Whose sentry-station graced some wanton's gate, 1201

Thou didst push forward and show mettle, shame
 The laggards, and retrieve the day. Well done !
 Be glad thou hast let light into the world,
 Through that irregular breach o' the boundary,—see
 The same upon thy path and march assured, 1206
 Learning anew the use of soldiership,
 Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
 Loyalty to the life's end ! Ruminating,
 Deserve the initiatory spasm,—once more 1210
 Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son !

And troop you, somewhere 'twixt the best and worst,
 Where crowd the indifferent product, all too poor
 Makeshift, starved samples of humanity !
 Father and mother, huddle there and hide ! 1215
 A gracious eye may find you ! Foul and fair,
 Sadly mixed natures : self-indulgent,—yet
 Self-sacrificing too : how the love soars,
 How the craft, avarice, vanity and spite
 Sink again ! So they keep the middle course, 1220
 Slide into silly crime at unaware,
 Slip back upon the stupid virtue, stay
 Nowhere enough for being classed, I hope
 And fear. Accept the swift and rueful death,

Taught, somewhat sternlier than is wont, what waits
 The ambiguous creature,—how the one black tuft 1226
 Steadies the aim of the arrow just as well
 As the wide faultless white on the bird's breast.
 Nay, you were punished in the very part
 That looked most pure of speck,—the honest love 1230
 Betrayed you,—did love seem most worthy pains,
 Challenge such purging, as ordained survive
 When all the rest of you was done with? Go!
 Never again elude the choice of tints!
 White shall not neutralise the black, nor good 1235
 Compensate bad in man, absolve him so:
 Life's business being just the terrible choice.

So do I see, pronounce on all and some
 Grouped for my judgment now,—profess no doubt
 While I pronounce: dark, difficult enough 1240
 The human sphere, yet eyes grow sharp by use,
 I find the truth, dispart the shine from shade,
 As a mere man may, with no special touch
 O' the lynx-gift in each ordinary orb:
 Nay, if the popular notion class me right, 1245
 One of well nigh decayed intelligence,—
 What of that? Through hard labour and good will,

And habitude that gives a blind man sight
 At the practised finger-ends of him, I do
 Discern, and dare decree in consequence, 1250
 Whatever prove the peril of mistake.

Whence, then, this quite new quick cold thrill,—cloud-
 like,

This keen dread creeping from a quarter scarce
 Suspected in the skies I nightly scan? 1254

What slacks the tense nerve, saps the wound-up spring
 Of the act that should and shall be, sends the mount
 And mass o' the whole man's-strength,—conglobed so
 late—

Shudderingly into dust, a moment's work?
 While I stand firm, go fearless, in this world,
 For this life recognise and arbitrate, 1260

Touch and let stay, or else remove a thing,
 Judge "This is right, this object out of place,"
 Candle in hand that helps me and to spare,—
 What if a voice deride me, "Perk and pry!
 "Brighten each nook with thine intelligence! 1265

"Play the good householder, ply man and maid
 "With tasks prolonged into the midnight, test
 "Their work and nowise stint of the due wage
 "Each worthy worker: but with gyves and whip

- " Pay thou misprision of a single point 1270
 " Plain to thy happy self who lift'st the light,
 " Lament'st the darkling,—bold to all beneath !
 " What if thyself adventure, now the place
 " Is purged so well ? Leave pavement and mount roof,
 " Look round thee for the light of the upper sky, 1275
 " The fire which lit thy fire which finds default
 " In Guido Franceschini to his cost !
 " What if, above in the domain of light,
 " Thou miss the accustomed signs, remark eclipse ?
 " Shalt thou still gaze on ground nor lift a lid,— 1280
 " Steady in thy superb prerogative,
 " Thy inch of inkling,—nor once face the doubt
 " I' the sphere above thee, darkness to be felt ?"

Yet my poor spark had for its source, the sun ;
 Thither I sent the great looks which compel 1285
 Light from its fount : all that I do and am
 Comes from the truth, or seen or else surmised,
 Remembered or divined, as mere man may :
 I know just so, nor otherwise. As I know,
 I speak,—what should I know, then, and how speak
 Were there a wild mistake of eye or brain 1291
 In the recorded governance above ?

If my own breath, only, blew coal alight
 I called celestial and the morning-star ?
 I, who in this world act resolvedly, 1295
 Dispose of men, the body and the soul,
 As they acknowledge or gainsay this light
 I show them,—shall I too lack courage?—leave
 I, too, the post of me, like those I blame ?
 Refuse, with kindred inconsistency, 1300
 Grapple with danger whereby souls grow strong ?
 I am near the end ; but still not at the end ;
 All till the very end is trial in life :
 At this stage is the trial of my soul
 Danger to face, or danger to refuse ? 1305
 Shall I dare try the doubt now, or not dare ?

 O Thou,—as represented here to me
 In such conception as my soul allows,—
 Under Thy measureless my atom width !—
 Man's mind—what is it but a convex glass 1310
 Wherein are gathered all the scattered points
 Picked out of the immensity of sky,
 To reunite there, be our heaven on earth,
 Our known unknown, our God revealed to man ?
 Existent somewhere, somehow, as a whole ; 1315

Here, as a whole proportioned to our sense,—
 There, (which is nowhere, speech must babble thus !)
 In the absolute immensity, the whole
 Appreciable solely by Thyself,—
 Here, by the little mind of man, reduced 1320
 To littleness that suits his faculty,
 Appreciable too in the degree ;
 Between Thee and ourselves—nay even, again,
 Below us, to the extreme of the minute,
 Appreciable by how many and what diverse 1325
 Modes of the life Thou makest be ! (why live
 Except for love,—how love unless they know ?)
 Each of them, only filling to the edge,
 Insect or angel, his just length and breadth,
 Due facet of reflection,—full, no less, 1330
 Angel or insect, as Thou framedst things,—
 I it is who have been appointed here
 To represent Thee, in my turn, on earth,
 Just as, if new philosophy know aught,
 This one earth, out of all the multitude 1335
 Of peopled worlds, as stars are now supposed,—
 Was chosen, and no sun-star of the swarm,
 For stage and scene of Thy transcendent act
 Beside which even the creation fades

Into a puny exercise of power. 1340
 Choice of the world, choice of the thing I am,
 Both emanate alike from the dread play
 Of operation outside this our sphere
 Where things are classed and counted small or great,—
 Incomprehensibly the choice is Thine ! 1345
 I therefore bow my head and take Thy place.
 There is, beside the works, a tale of Thee
 In the world's mouth which I find credible :
 I love it with my heart : unsatisfied,
 I try it with my reason, nor discept 1350
 From any point I probe and pronounce sound.
 Mind is not matter nor from matter, but
 Above,—leave matter then, proceed with mind :
 Man's be the mind recognized at the height,—
 Leave the inferior minds and look at man. 1355
 Is he the strong, intelligent and good
 Up to his own conceivable height? Nowise.
 Enough o' the low,—soar the conceivable height,
 Find cause to match the effect in evidence,
 Works in the world, not man's, then God's ; leave man :
 Conjecture of the worker by the work : 1361
 Is there strength there ?—enough : intelligence ?
 Ample : but goodness in a like degree ? *

Not to the human eye in the present state,
 This isoscele deficient in the base. 1365
 What lacks, then, of perfection fit for God
 But just the instance which this tale supplies
 Of love without a limit? So is strength,
 So is intelligence ; then love is so,
 Unlimited in its self-sacrifice : 1370
 Then is the tale true and God shows complete.
 Beyond the tale, I reach into the dark,
 Feel what I cannot see, and still faith stands :
 I can believe this dread machinery
 Of sin and sorrow, would confound me else, 1375
 Devised,—all pain, at most expenditure
 Of pain by Who devised pain,—to evolve,
 By new machinery in counterpart,
 The moral qualities of man—how else?—
 To make him love in turn and be beloved, 1380
 Creative and self-sacrificing too,
 And thus eventually God-like, (ay,
 “ I have said ye are Gods,”—shall it be said for nought?)
 Enable man to wring, from out all pain,
 All pleasure for a common heritage 1385
 To all eternity : this may be surmised,
 The other is revealed,—whether a fact,

Absolute, abstract, independent truth,
 Historic, not reduced to suit man's mind,—
 Or only truth reverberate, changed, made pass 1390
 A spectrum into mind, the narrow eye,—
 The same and not the same, else unconceived—
 Though quite conceivable to the next grade
 Above it in intelligence,—as truth
 Easy to man were blindness to the beast 1395
 By parity of procedure,—the same truth
 In a new form, but changed in either case :
 What matter so the intelligence be filled?
 To the child, the sea is angry, for it roars ;
 Frost bites, else why the tooth-like fret on face ? 1400
 Man makes acoustics deal with the sea's wrath,
 Explains the choppy cheek by chymic law,—
 To both, remains one and the same effect
 On drum of ear and root of nose, change cause
 Never so thoroughly : so our heart be struck, 1405
 What care I,—by God's gloved hand or the bare?
 Nor do I much perplex me with aught hard,
 Dubious in the transmitting of the tale,—
 No, nor with certain riddles set to solve.
 This life is training and a passage ; pass,— 1410
 Still, we march over some flat obstacle

We made give way before us ; solid truth
 In front of it, were motion for the world ?
 The moral sense grows but by exercise.

'T is even as man grew probatively 1415

Initiated in Godship, set to make

A fairer moral world than this he finds,

Guess now what shall be known hereafter. Thus,

O' the present problem : as we see and speak,

A faultless creature is destroyed, and sin 1420

Has had its way i' the world where God should rule.

Ay, but for this irrelevant circumstance

Of inquisition after blood, we see

Pompilia lost and Guido saved : how long ?

For his whole life : how much is that whole life ? 1425

We are not babes, but know the minute's worth,

And feel that life is large and the world small,

So, wait till life have passed from out the world.

Neither does this astonish at the end,

That, whereas I can so receive and trust, 1430

Men, made with hearts and souls the same as mine,

Reject and disbelieve,—subordinate

The future to the present,—sin, nor fear.

This I refer still to the foremost fact,

Life is probation and this earth no goal 1435
But starting-point of man : compel him strive,
Which means, in man, as good as reach the goal,—
Why institute that race, his life, at all ?
But this does overwhelm me with surprise,
Touch me to terror,—not that faith, the pearl, 1440
Should be let lie by fishers wanting food,—
Nor, seen and handled by a certain few
Critical and contemptuous, straight consigned
To shore and shingle for the pebble it proves,—
But that, when haply found and known and named 1445
By the residue made rich for evermore,
These,—ay, these favoured ones, should in a trice
Turn, and with double zest go dredge for whelks,
Mud-worms that make the savoury soup. Enough
O' the disbelievers, see the faithful few ! 1450
How do the Christians here deport them, keep
Their robes of white unspotted by the world ?
What is this Aretine Archbishop, this
Man under me as I am under God,
This champion of the faith, I armed and decked, 1455
Pushed forward, put upon a pinnacle,
To show the enemy his victor,—see !
What 's the best fighting when the couple close ?

Pompilia cries, "Protect me from the fiend!"

"No, for thy Guido is one heady, strong, 1460

"Dangerous to disquiet: let him bide!

"He needs some bone to mumble, help amuse

"The darkness of his den with: so, the fawn

"Which limps up bleeding to my foot and lies,

"—Come to me, daughter,—thus I throw him back!"

Have we misjudged here, over-armed the knight, 1466

Given gold and silk where the plain steel serves best,

Enfeebled whom we sought to fortify,

Made an archbishop and undone a saint?

Well then, descend these heights, this pride of life, 1470

Sit in the ashes with the barefoot monk

Who long ago stamped out the worldly sparks.

Fasting and watching, stone cell and wire scourge,

—No such indulgence as unknits the strength—

These breed the tight nerve and tough cuticle, 1475

Let the world's praise or blame run rillet-wise

Off the broad back and brawny breast, we know!

He meets the first cold sprinkle of the world

And shudders to the marrow, "Save this child?"

"Oh, my superiors, oh, the Archbishop here! 1480

"Who was it dared lay hand upon the ark

"His betters saw fall nor put finger forth?"

“ Great ones could help yet help not : why should small ?

“ I break my promise : let her break her heart ! ”

These are the Christians not the worldlings, not 1485

The sceptics, who thus battle for the faith !

If foolish virgins disobey and sleep,

What wonder ? But the wise that watch, this time

Sell lamps and buy lutes, exchange oil for wine,

The mystic Spouse betrays the Bridegroom here. 1490

To our last resource, then ! Since all flesh is weak,

Bind weaknesses together, we get strength :

The individual weighed, found wanting, try

Some institution, honest artifice

Whereby the units grow compact and firm : 1495

Each props the other, and so stand is made

By our embodied cowards that grow brave.

The Monastery called of Convertites,

Meant to help women because these helped Christ,—

A thing existent only while it acts, 1500

Does as designed, else a nonentity,

For what is an idea unrealized ?—

Pompilia is consigned to these for help.

They do help ; they are prompt to testify

To her pure life and saintly dying days. 1505

She dies, and lo, who seemed so poor, proves rich !

What does the body that lives through helpfulness
 To women for Christ's sake? The kiss turns bite,
 The dove's note changes to the crow's cry : judge !
 " Seeing that this our Convent claims of right 1510
 " What goods belong to those we succour, be
 " The same proved women of dishonest life,—
 " And seeing that this Trial made appear
 " Pompilia was in such predicament,—
 " The Convent hereupon pretends to said 1515
 " Succession of Pompilia, issues writ,
 " And takes possession by the Fisc's advice."
 Such is their attestation to the cause
 Of Christ, who had one saint at least, they hoped :
 But, is a title-deed to filch, a corpse 1520
 To slander, and an infant-heir to cheat ?
 Christ must give up his gains then ! They unsay
 All the fine speeches,—who was saint is whore.
 Why, scripture yields no parallel for this !
 The soldiers only threw dice for Christ's coat ; 1525
 We want another legend of the Twelve
 Disputing if it was Christ's coat at all,
 Claiming as prize the woof of price—for why ?
 The Master was a thief, purloined the same,
 Or paid for it out of the common bag ! 1530

Can it be this is end and outcome, all
 I take with me to show as stewardship's fruit,
 The best yield of the latest time, this year
 The seventeen-hundredth since God died for man ?
 Is such effect proportionate to cause ? 1535
 And still the terror keeps on the increase
 When I perceive . . . how can I blink the fact ?
 That the fault, the obduracy to good,
 Lies not with the impracticable stuff
 Whence man is made, his very nature's fault, 1540
 As if it were of ice, the moon may gild
 Not melt, or stone, 't was meant the sun should warm
 Not make bear flowers,—nor ice nor stone to blame :
 But it can melt, that ice, and bloom, that stone,
 Impassible to rule of day and night ! 1545
 This terrifies me, thus compelled perceive,
 Whatever love and faith we looked should spring
 At advent of the authoritative star,
 Which yet lie sluggish, curdled at the source,—
 These have leapt forth profusely in old time, 1550
 These still respond with promptitude to-day,
 At challenge of—what unacknowledged powers
 O' the air, what uncommissioned meteors, warmth
 By law, and light by rule should supersede ?

For see this priest, this Caponsacchi, stung 1555
 At the first summons,—“ Help for honour’s sake,
 “ Play the man, pity the oppressed !”—no pause,
 How does he lay about him in the midst,
 Strike any foe, right wrong at any risk,
 All blindness, bravery and obedience !—blind? 1560
 Ay, as a man would be inside the sun,
 Delirious with the plenitude of light
 Should interfuse him to the finger-ends—
 Let him rush straight, and how shall he go wrong ?
 Where are the Christians in their panoply ? 1565
 The loins we girt about with truth, the breasts
 Righteousness plated round, the shield of faith,
 The helmet of salvation, and that sword
 O’ the Spirit, even the word of God,—where these ?
 Slunk into corners ! Oh, I hear at once 1570
 Hubbub of protestation ! “ What, we monks
 “ We friars, of such an order, such a rule,
 “ Have not we fought, bled, left our martyr-mark
 “ At every point along the boundary-line
 “ ’Twixt true and false, religion and the world, 1575
 “ Where this or the other dogma of our Church
 “ Called for defence ?” And I, despite myself,
 How can I but speak loud what truth speaks low,

- “ Or better than the best, or nothing serves !
 “ What boots deed, I can cap and cover straight 1580
 “ With such another doughtiness to match,
 “ Done at an instinct of the natural man ? ”
 Immolate body, sacrifice soul too,—
 Do not these publicans the same ? Outstrip !
 Or else stop race, you boast runs neck and neck, 1585
 You with the wings, they with the feet,—for shame !
 Oh, I remark your diligence and zeal !
 Five years long, now, rounds faith into my ears,
 “ Help thou, or Christendom is done to death ! ”
 Five years since, in the Province of To-kien, 1590
 Which is in China as some people know,
 Maigrot, my Vicar Apostolic there,
 Having a great qualm, issues a decree.
 Alack, the converts use as God’s name, not
Tien-chu but plain *Tien* or else mere *Shang-ti*, 1595
 As Jesuits please to fancy politic,
 While, say Dominicans, it calls down fire,—
 For *Tien* means heaven, and *Shang-ti*, supreme prince,
 While *Tien-chu* means the lord of heaven : all cry,
 “ There is no business urgent for despatch 1600
 “ As that thou send a legate, specially
 “ Cardinal Tournon, straight to Peking, there

“ To settle and compose the difference ! ”

So have I seen a potentate all fume

For some infringement of his realm's just right, 1605

Some menace to a mud-built straw-thatched farm

O' the frontier, while inside the mainland lie,

Quite undisputed-for in solitude,

Whole cities plague may waste or famine sap :

What if the sun crumble, the sands encroach, 1610

While he looks on sublimely at his ease ?

How does their ruin touch the empire's bound ?

And is this little all that was to be ?

Where is the gloriously-decisive change,

The immeasurable metamorphosis 1615

Of human clay to divine gold, we looked

Should, in some poor sort, justify the price ?

Had a mere adept of the Rosy Cross

Spent his life to consummate the Great Work,

Would not we start to see the stuff it touched 1620

Yield not a grain more than the vulgar got

By the old smelting-process years ago ?

If this were sad to see in just the sage

Who should profess so much, perform no more,

What is it when suspected in that Power 1625

Who undertook to make and made the world,
 Devised and did effect man, body and soul,
 Ordained salvation for them both, and yet . .
 Well, is the thing we see, salvation?

I 1630

Put no such dreadful question to myself,
 Within whose circle of experience burns
 The central truth, Power, Wisdom, Goodness,—God :
 I must outlive a thing ere know it dead :
 When I outlive the faith there is a sun, 1635
 When I lie, ashes to the very soul,—
 Someone, not I, must wail above the heap,
 “ He died in dark whence never morn arose.”
 While I see day succeed the deepest night—
 How can I speak but as I know?—my speech 1640
 Must be, throughout the darkness, “ It will end :”
 “ The light that did burn, will burn !” Clouds obscure—
 But for which obscuration all were bright ?
 Too hastily concluded ! Sun-suffused,
 A cloud may soothe the eye made blind by blaze,—
 Better the very clarity of heaven : 1646
 The soft-streaks are the beautiful and dear.
 What but the weakness in a faith supplies
 The incentive to humanity, no strength

Absolute, irresistible, comports? 1650
 How can man love but what he yearns to help?
 And that which men think weakness within strength,
 But angels know for strength and stronger yet—
 What were it else but the first things made new,
 But repetition of the miracle, 1655
 The divine instance of self-sacrifice
 That never ends and aye begins for man?
 So, never I miss footing in the maze,
 No,—I have light nor fear the dark at all.

But are mankind not real, who pace outside 1660
 My petty circle, the world measured me?
 And when they stumble even as I stand,
 Have I a right to stop ears when they cry,
 As they were phantoms, took the clouds for crags,
 Tripped and fell, where the march of man might move?
 Beside, the cry is other than a ghost's, 1666
 When out of the old time there pleads some bard,
 Philosopher, or both and—whispers not,
 But words it boldly. "The inward work and worth
 " Of any mind, what other mind may judge 1670
 " Save God who only knows the thing He made,
 " The veritable service He exacts?

- “ It is the outward product men appraise.
“ Behold, an engine hoists a tower aloft :
“ ‘ I looked that it should move the mountain too !’
“ Or else ‘ Had just a turret toppled down, 1676
“ Success enough !’—may say the Machinist
“ Who knows what less or more result might be :
“ But we, who see that done we cannot do,
“ ‘ A feat beyond man’s force,’ we men must say. 1680
“ Regard me and that shake I gave the world !
“ I was born, not so long before Christ’s birth,
“ As Christ’s birth haply did precede thy day,—
“ But many a watch, before the star of dawn :
“ Therefore I lived,—it is thy creed affirms, 1685
“ Pope Innocent, who art to answer me !—
“ Under conditions, nowise to escape,
“ Whereby salvation was impossible.
“ Each impulse to achieve the good and fair,
“ Each aspiration to the pure and true, 1690
“ Being without a warrant or an aim,
“ Was just as sterile a felicity
“ As if the insect, born to spend his life
“ Soaring his circles, stopped them to describe
“ (Painfully motionless in the mid-air) 1695
“ Some word of weighty counsel for man’s sake,

- “ Some ‘ Know thyself ’ or ‘ Take the golden mean ! ’
 “ —Forwent his happy dance and the glad ray,
 “ Died half an hour the sooner and was dust.
 “ I, born to perish like the brutes, or worse, 1700
 “ Why not live brutishly, obey my law ?
 “ But I, of body as of soul complete,
 “ A gymnast at the games, philosopher
 “ I’ the schools, who painted, and made music,—all
 “ Glories that met upon the tragic stage 1705
 “ When the Third Poet’s tread surprised the Two,—
 “ Whose lot fell in a land where life was great
 “ And sense went free and beauty lay profuse,
 “ I, untouched by one adverse circumstance,
 “ Adopted virtue as my rule of life, 1710
 “ Waived all reward, and loved for loving’s sake,
 “ And, what my heart taught me, I taught the world,
 “ And have been teaching now two thousand years.
 “ Witness my work,—plays that should please, forsooth !
 “ ‘ They might please, they may displease, they shall
 teach,
 “ ‘ For truth’s sake,’ so I said, and did, and do. 1716
 “ Five hundred years ere Paul spoke, Felix heard,—
 “ How much of temperance and righteousness,
 “ Judgment to come, did I find reason for,

- " Corroborate with my strong style that spared 1720
 " No sin, nor swerved the more from branding brow
 " Because the sinner was called Zeus and God?
 " How nearly did I guess at that Paul knew?
 " How closely come, in what I represent
 " As duty, to his doctrine yet a blank? 1725
 " And as that limner not untruly limns
 " Who draws an object round or square, which square
 " Or round seems to the unassisted eye,
 " Though Galileo's tube display the same
 " Oval or oblong,—so, who controverts 1730
 " I rendered rightly what proves wrongly wrought
 " Beside Paul's picture? Mine was true for me.
 " I saw that there are, first and above all,
 " The hidden forces, blind necessities,
 " Named Nature, but the thing's self unconceived: 1735
 " Then follow,—how dependent upon these,
 " We know not, how imposed above ourselves,
 " We well know,—what I name the gods, a power
 " Various or one; for great and strong and good
 " Is there, and little, weak and bad there too, 1740
 " Wisdom and folly: say, these make no God,—
 " What is it else that rules outside man's self?
 " A fact then,—always, to the naked eye,—

- “ And, so, the one revealment possible
 “ Of what were unimagined else by man. 1745
 “ Therefore, what gods do, man may criticise,
 “ Applaud, condemn,—how should he fear the truth?
 “ But likewise have in awe because of power,
 “ Venerate for the main munificence,
 “ And give the doubtful deed its due excuse 1750
 “ From the acknowledged creature of a day
 “ To the Eternal and Divine. Thus, bold
 “ Yet self-mistrusting, should man bear himself,
 “ Most assured on what now concerns him most—
 “ The law of his own life, the path he prints,— 1755
 “ Which law is virtue and not vice, I say,—
 “ And least inquisitive where least search skills,
 “ I’ the nature we best give the clouds to keep.
 “ What could I paint beyond a scheme like this
 “ Out of the fragmentary truths where light 1760
 “ Lay fitful in a tenebrific time?
 “ You have the sunrise now, joins truth to truth,
 “ Shoots life and substance into death and void ;
 “ Themselves compose the whole we made before :
 “ The forces and necessity grow God,— 1765
 “ The beings so contrarious that seemed gods,
 “ Prove just His operation manifold

- “ And multiform, translated, as must be,
“ Into intelligible shape so far
“ As suits our sense and sets us free to feel : 1770
“ What if I let a child think, childhood-long,
“ That lightning, I would have him spare his eye,
“ Is a real arrow shot at naked orb?
“ The man knows more, but shuts his lids the same :
“ Lightning’s cause comprehends nor man nor child. 1775
“ Why then, my scheme, your better knowledge broke,
“ Presently readjusts itself, the small
“ Proportioned largelier, parts and whole named new :
“ So much, no more two thousand years have done !
“ Pope, dost thou dare pretend to punish me, 1780
“ For not descrying sunshine at midnight,
“ Me who crept all-fours, found my way so far—
“ While thou rewardest teachers of the truth,
“ Who miss the plain way in the blaze of noon,—
“ Though just a word from that strong style of mine,
“ Grasped honestly in hand as guiding-staff, 1786
“ Had pricked them a sure path across the bog,
“ That mire of cowardice and slush of lies
“ Wherein I find them wallow in wide day?”

How should I answer this Euripides? 1790

Paul,—'t is a legend,—answered Seneca,
 But that was in the day-spring ; noon is now
 We have got too familiar with the light.
 Shall I wish back once more that thrill of dawn ?
 When the whole truth-touched man burned up, one fire ?
 —Assured the trial, fiery, fierce, but fleet, 1796
 Would, from his little heap of ashes, lend
 Wings to the conflagration of the world
 Which Christ awaits ere He make all things new—
 So should the frail become the perfect, rapt 1800
 From glory of pain to glory of joy ; and so,
 Even in the end,—the act renouncing earth,
 Lands, houses, husbands, wives and children here,—
 Begin that other act which finds all, lost,
 Regained, in this time even, a hundredfold, 1805
 And, in the next time, feels the finite love
 Blent and embalmed with its eternal life.
 So does the sun ghastlily seem to sink
 In those north parts, lean all but out of life,
 Desist a dread mere breathing-stop, then slow 1810
 Reassert day, begin the endless rise.
 Was this too easy for our after-stage ?
 Was such a lighting-up of faith, in life,
 Only allowed initiate, set man's step

In the true way by help of the great glow? 1815
 A way wherein it is ordained he walk,
 Bearing to see the light from heaven still more
 And more encroached on by the light of earth,
 Tentatives earth puts forth to rival heaven,
 Earthly incitements that mankind serve God 1820
 For man's sole sake, not God's and therefore man's,
 Till at last, who distinguishes the sun
 From a mere Druid fire on a far mount?
 More praise to him who with his subtle prism
 Shall decompose both beams and name the true. 1825
 In such sense, who is last proves first indeed ;
 For how could saints and martyrs fail see truth
 Streak the night's blackness? Who is faithful now,
 Untwists heaven's pure white from the yellow flare
 O' the world's gross torch, without a foil to help 1830
 Produce the Christian act, so possible
 When in the way stood Nero's cross and stake,—
 So hard now that the world smiles " Rightly done !
 " It is the politic, the thrifty way,
 " Will clearly make you in the end returns 1835
 " Beyond our fool's-sport and improvidence :
 " We fools go thro' the cornfield of this life,
 " Pluck ears to left and right and swallow raw,

“ —Nay, tread, at pleasure, a sheaf underfoot,
 “ To get the better at some poppy-flower,— 1840
 “ Well aware we shall have so much wheat less
 “ In the eventual harvest : you meantime
 “ Waste not a spike,—the richier will you reap !
 “ What then ? There will be always garnered meal
 “ Sufficient for our comfortable loaf, 1845
 “ While you enjoy the undiminished prize !”

Is it not this ignoble confidence,
 Cowardly hardihood, that dulls and damps,
 Makes the old heroism impossible ?

Unless . . what whispers me of times to come ? 1850
 What if it be the mission of that age,
 My death will usher into life, to shake
 This torpor of assurance from our creed,
 Re-introduce the doubt discarded, bring
 The formidable danger back, we drove 1855
 Long ago to the distance and the dark ?
 No wild beast now prowls round the infant camp ;
 We have built wall and sleep in city safe :
 But if the earthquake try the towers, that laugh
 To think they once saw lions rule outside, 1860
 Till man stand out again, pale, resolute,

Prepared to die,—that is, alive at last?
 As we broke up that old faith of the world,
 Have we, next age, to break up this the new—
 Faith, in the thing, grown faith in the report— 1865
 Whence need to bravely disbelieve report
 Through increased faith in thing reports belie?
 Must we deny,—do they, these Molinists,
 At peril of their body and their soul,—
 Recognized truths, obedient to some truth 1870
 Unrecognized yet, but perceptible?—
 Correct the portrait by the living face,
 Man's God, by God's God in the mind of man?
 Then, for the few that rise to the new height,
 The many that must sink to the old depth, 1875
 The multitude found fall away! A few,
 E'en ere the new law speak clear, keep the old,
 Preserve the Christian level, call good good
 And evil evil, (even though razed and blank
 The old titles stand,) thro' custom, habitude, 1880
 And all they may mistake for finer sense
 O' the fact than reason warrants,—as before,
 They hope perhaps, fear not impossibly.
 Surely some one Pompilia in the world
 Will say "I know the right place by foot's feel, 1885

“ I took it and tread firm there ; wherefore change ? ”

But what a multitude will fall, perchance,

Quite through the crumbling truth subjacent late,

Sink to the next discoverable base,

Rest upon human nature, take their stand

1890

On what is fact, the lust and pride of life !

The mass of men, whose very souls even now

Seem to need re-creating,—so they slink

Worm-like into the mud light now lays bare,—

Whose future we dispose of with shut eyes

1895

“ They are baptized,—grafted, the barren twigs,

“ Into the living stock of Christ : may bear

“ One day, till when they lie death-like, not dead,”—

Those who with all the aid of Christ lie thus,

How, without Christ, whither, unaided, sink ?

1900

What but to this rehearsed before my eyes ?

Do not we end, the century and I ?

The impatient antimasque treads close on kibe

O' the very masque's self it will mock,—on me,

Last lingering personage, the impatient mime

1905

Pushes already,—will I block the way ?

Will my slow trail of garments ne'er leave space

For pantaloon, sock, plume and castanet ?

Here comes the first experimentalist

In the new order of things,—he plays a priest ; 1910
 Does he take inspiration from the Church,
 Directly make her rule his law of life ?
 Not he : his own mere impulse guides the man—
 Happily sometimes, since ourselves admit
 He has danced, in gaiety of heart, i' the main 1915
 The right step in the maze we bade him foot.
 What if his heart had prompted to break loose
 And mar the measure ? Why, we must submit
 And thank the chance that brought him safely through.
 Will he repeat the prodigy ? Perhaps. 1920
 Can he teach others how to quit themselves,
 Prove why this step was right, while that were wrong ?
 How should he ? “ Ask your hearts as I asked mine,
 “ And get discreetly through the morrice so ;
 “ If your hearts misdirect you,—quit the stage, 1925
 “ And make amends,—be there amends to make.”
 Such is, for the Augustine that was once,
 This Canon Caponsacchi we see now.
 “ And my heart answers to another tune,”
 Puts in the Abate, second in the suite, 1930
 “ I have my taste too, and tread no such step !
 “ You choose the glorious life, and may, for me,
 “ Who like the lowest of life's appetites,—

- " What you judge,—but the very truth of joy
 " To my own apprehension which must judge. 1935
 " Call me knave and you get yourself called fool !
 " I live for greed, ambition, lust, revenge ;
 " Attain these ends by force, guile : hypocrite,
 " To-day, perchance to-morrow recognized
 " The rational man, the type of common sense." 1940
 There 's Loyola adapted to our time !
 Under such guidance Guido plays his part,
 He also influencing in due turn
 These last clods where I track intelligence
 By any glimmer, those four at his beck 1945
 Ready to murder any, and, at their own,
 As ready to murder him,—these are the world !
 And, first effect of the new cause of things,
 There they lie also duly,—the old pair
 Of the weak head and not so wicked heart, 1950
 And the one Christian mother, wife and girl,
 —Which three gifts seem to make an angel up,—
 'The first foot of the dance is on their heads !

 Still, I stand here, not off the stage though close
 On the exit : and my last act, as my first, 1955
 I owe the scene, and Him who armed me thus

With Paul's sword as with Peter's key. I smite
 With my whole strength once more, then end my part,
 Ending, so far as man may, this offence.
 And when I raise my arm, what plucks my sleeve? 1960
 Who stops me in the righteous function,—foe
 Or friend? O, still as ever, friends are they
 Who, in the interest of outraged truth
 Deprecate such rough handling of a lie!
 The facts being proved and incontestable, 1965
 What is the last word I must listen to?
 Is it "Spare yet a term this barren stock,
 "We pray thee dig about and dung and dress
 "Till he repent and bring forth fruit even yet?"
 Is it "So poor and swift a punishment 1970
 "Shall throw him out of life with all that sin?
 "Let mercy rather pile up pain on pain
 "Till the flesh expiate what the soul pays else?"
 Nowise! Remonstrance on all sides begins
 Instruct me, there's a new tribunal now 1975
 Higher than God's,—the educated man's!
 Nice sense of honour in the human breast
 Supersedes here the old coarse oracle—
 Confirming handsomely a point or so
 Wherein the predecessor worked aright 1980

By rule of thumb : as when Christ said,—when, where ?
Enough, I find it in a pleading here,—

“ All other wrongs done, patiently I take :

“ But touch my honour and the case is changed !

“ I feel the due resentment,—*nemini* 1985

“ *Honorem trado*, is my quick retort.”

Right of Him, just as if pronounced to-day !

Still, should the old authority be mute,

Or doubtful, or in speaking clash with new,

The younger takes permission to decide. 1990

At last we have the instinct of the world

Ruling its household without tutelage,

And while the two laws, human and divine,

Have busied finger with this tangled case,

In the brisk junior pushes, cuts the knot, 1995

Pronounces for acquittal. How it trips

Silverly o'er the tongue ! “ Remit the death !

“ Forgive, . . well, in the old way, if thou please,

“ Decency and the relics of routine

“ Respected,—let the Count go free as air ! 2000

“ Since he may plead a priest's immunity,—

“ The minor orders help enough for that,

“ With Farinacci's licence,—who decides

“ That the mere implication of such man,

- “ So privileged, in any cause, before 2005
 “ Whatever court except the Spiritual,
 “ Straight quashes the procedure,—quash it, then !
 “ It proves a pretty loophole of escape
 “ Moreover, that, beside the patent fact
 “ O’ the law’s allowance, there ’s involved the weal 2010
 “ O’ the Popedom : a son’s privilege at stake,
 “ Thou wilt pretend the Church’s interest,
 “ Ignore all finer reasons to forgive !
 “ But herein lies the proper cogency—
 “ (Let thy friends teach thee while thou tellest beads)
 “ That in this case the spirit of culture speaks, 2016
 “ Civilization is imperative.
 “ To her shall we remand all delicate points
 “ Henceforth, nor take irregular advice
 “ O’ the sly, as heretofore : she used to hint 2020
 “ Apologies when law was out of sorts
 “ Because a saucy tongue was put to rest,
 “ An eye that roved was cured of arrogance :
 “ But why be forced to mumble under breath
 “ What soon shall be acknowledged the plain fact, 2025
 “ Outspoken, say, in thy successor’s time ?
 “ Methinks we see the golden age return !
 “ Civilization and the Emperor

- " Succeed thy Christianity and Pope.
 " One Emperor then, as one Pope now : meanwhile,
 " She anticipates a little to tell thee ' Take 2031
 " ' Count Guido's life, and sap society,
 " ' Whereof the main prop was, is, and shall prove
 " ' —Supremacy of husband over wife !'
 " Shall the man rule i' the house, or may his mate 2035
 " Because of any plea dispute the same ?
 " Oh, pleas of all sorts shall abound, be sure,
 " If once allowed validity,—for, harsh
 " And savage, for, inept and silly-sooth,
 " For, this and that, will the ingenious sex 2040
 " Demonstrate the best master e'er graced slave :
 " And there 's but one short way to end the coil,—
 " By giving right and reason steadily
 " To the man and master : then the wife submits.
 " There it is broadly stated,—nor the time 2045
 " Admits we shift—a pillar ? nay, a stake
 " Out of its place i' the tenement, one touch
 " Whereto may send a shudder through the heap
 " And bring it toppling on our heads perchance.
 " Moreover, if this breed a qualm in thee, 2050
 " Give thine own feelings play for once,—deal death ?
 " Thou, whose own life winks o'er the socket-edge,

- " Would'st thou it went out in such ugly snuff
 " As dooming sons to death, though justice bade?
 " Why, on a certain feast, Barabbas' self 2055
 " Was set free not to cloud the general cheer.
 " Neither shalt thou pollute thy Sabbath close!
 " Mercy is safe and graceful. How one hears
 " The howl begin, scarce the three little taps
 " O' the silver mallet ended on thy brow,— 2060
 " ' His last act was to sacrifice a Count
 " ' And thereby screen a scandal of the Church!
 " ' Guido condemned, the Canon justified
 " ' Of course,—delinquents of his cloth go free!
 " And so the Luthers and the Calvins come, 2065
 " So thy hand helps Molinos to the chair
 " Whence he may hold forth till doom's day on just
 " These *petit-mâitre* priestlings,—in the choir,
 " *Sanctus et Benedictus*, with a brush
 " Of soft guitar-strings that obey the thumb, 2070
 " Touched by the bedside, for accompaniment!
 " Does this give umbrage to a husband? Death
 " To the fool, and to the priest impunity!
 " But no impunity to any friend
 " So simply over-loyal as these four 2075
 " Who made religion of their patron's cause,

" Believed in him and did his bidding straight,
 " Asked not one question but laid down the lives
 " This Pope took,—all four lives together made
 " Just his own length of days,—so, dead they lie, 2080
 " As these were times when loyalty 's a drug,
 " And zeal in a subordinate too cheap
 " And common to be saved when we spend life !
 " Come, 't is too much good breath we waste in words :
 " The pardon, Holy Father ! Spare grimace, 2085
 " Shrugs and reluctance ! Are not we the world,
 " Bid thee, our Priam, let soft culture plead
 " Hecuba-like, '*non tali*' (Virgil serves)
 " '*Auxilio*,' and the rest ! Enough, it works !
 " The Pope relaxes, and the Prince is loth, 2090
 " The father's bowels yearn, the man's will bends,
 " Reply is apt. Our tears on tremble, hearts
 " Big with a benediction, wait the word
 " Shall circulate thro' the city in a trice,
 " Set every window flaring, give each man 2095
 " O' the mob his torch to wave for gratitude.
 " Pronounce it, for our breath and patience fail !"

I will, Sirs : for a voice other than yours
 Quickens my spirit. " *Quis pro Domino?*

“ Who is upon the Lord’s side ? ” asked the Count.

I, who write—

2101

“ On receipt of this command,

“ Acquaint Count Guido and his fellows four

“ They die to-morrow : could it be to-night,

“ The better, but the work to do, takes time.

2105

“ Set with all diligence a scaffold up,

“ Not in the customary place, by Bridge

“ Saint Angelo, where die the common sort ;

“ But since the man is noble, and his peers

“ By predilection haunt the People’s Square,

2110

“ There let him be beheaded in the midst,

“ And his companions hanged on either side :

“ So shall the quality see, fear and learn.

“ All which work takes time : till to-morrow, then,

“ Let there be prayer incessant for the five ! ”

2115

For the main criminal I have no hope

Except in such a suddenness of fate.

I stood at Naples once, a night so dark

I could have scarce conjectured there was earth

Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all :

2120

But the night’s black was burst through by a blaze—

Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,

Through her whole length of mountain visible :
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea. 2125
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
Else I avert my face, nor follow him
Into that sad obscure sequestered state
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul 2130
He else made first in vain ; which must not be.
Enough, for I may die this very night
And how should I dare die, this man let live ?

Carry this forthwith to the Governor !

XI.

G U I D O .

You are the Cardinal Acciaiuoli, and you,
Abate Panciatichi—two good Tuscan names :
Acciaiuoli—ah, your ancestor it was,
Built the huge battlemented convent-block
Over the little forky flashing Greve 5
That takes the quick turn at the foot o' the hill
Just as one first sees Florence : oh those days !
'T is Ema, though, the other rivulet,
The one-arched, brown brick bridge yawns over,—yes,
Gallop and go five minutes, and you gain 10
The Roman Gate from where the Ema 's bridged :
Kingfishers fly there : how I see the bend
O'erturreted by Certosa which he built,

That Senescal (we styled him) of your House !
 I do adjure you, help me, Sirs ! My blood 15
 Comes from as far a source : ought it to end
 This way, by leakage through their scaffold-planks
 Into Rome's sink where her red refuse runs ?
 Sirs, I beseech you by blood-sympathy,
 If there be any vile experiment 20
 In the air,—if this your visit simply prove,
 When all 's done, just a well-intentioned trick,
 That tries for truth truer than truth itself,
 By startling up a man, ere break of day,
 To tell him he must die at sunset,—pshaw ! 25
 That man 's a Franceschini ; feel his pulse,
 Laugh at your folly, and let 's all go sleep !
 You have my last word,—innocent am I
 As Innocent my Pope and murderer,
 Innocent as a babe, as Mary's own, 30
 As Mary's self,—I said, say and repeat,—
 And why, then, should I die twelve hours hence ? I—
 Whom, not twelve hours ago, the gaoler bade
 Turn to my straw-truss, settle and sleep sound
 That I might wake the sooner, promptlier pay 35
 His dues of meat-and-drink-indulgence, cross
 His palm with fee of the good-hand, beside,

As gallants use who go at large again !
For why ? All honest Rome approved my part ;
Whoever owned wife, sister, daughter,—nay, 40
Mistress,—had any shadow of any right
That looks like right, and, all the more resolved,
Held it with tooth and nail,—these manly men
Approved ! I being for Rome, Rome was for me !
Then, there 's the point reserved, the subterfuge 45
My lawyers held by, kept for last resource,
Firm should all else,—the impossible fancy !—fail,—
And sneaking burgess-spirit win the day :
The knaves ! One plea at least would hold, they laughed,
One grappling-iron scratch the bottom-rock 50
Even should the middle mud let anchor go—
And hook my cause on to the Clergy's,—plea
Which, even if law tipped off my hat and plume,
Would show my priestly tonsure, save me so,—
The Pope moreover, this old Innocent, 55
Being so meek and mild and merciful,
So fond o' the poor and so fatigued of earth,
So . . . fifty thousand devils in deepest hell !
Why must he cure us of our strange conceit
Of the angel in man's likeness, that we loved 60
And looked should help us at a pinch ? He help ?

He pardon? Here 's his mind and message—death,
Thank the good Pope! Now, is he good in this,
Never mind, Christian,—no such stuff 's extant,—
But will my death do credit to his reign, 65
Show he both lived and let live, so was good?
Cannot I live if he but like? “The law!”
Why, just the law gives him the very chance,
The precise leave to let my life alone,
Which the angelic soul of him (he says) 70
Yearns after! Here they drop it in his palm,
My lawyers, capital o' the cursed kind,—
A life to take and hold and keep: but no!
He sighs, shakes head, refuses to shut hand,
Motions away the gift they bid him grasp, 75
And of the coyness comes that off I run
And down I go, he best knows whither,—mind,
He knows, and sets me rolling all the same!
Disinterested Vicar of our Lord,
This way he abrogates and disallows, 80
Nullifies and ignores,—reverts in fine
To the good and right, in detriment of me!
Talk away! Will you have the naked truth?
He 's sick of his life's supper,—swallowed lies:
So, hobbling bedward, needs must ease his maw 85

Just where I sit o' the door-sill. Sir Abate,
 Can you do nothing? Friends, we used to frisk :
 What of this sudden slash in a friend's face,
 This cut across our good companionship
 That showed its front so gay when both were young? 90
 Were not we put into a beaten path,
 Bid pace the world, we nobles born and bred,
 The body of friends with each his scutcheon full
 Of old achievement and impunity,—
 Taking the laugh of morn and Sol's salute, 95
 As forth we fared, pricked on to breathe our steeds
 And take equestrian sport over the green
 Under the blue, across the crop,—what care?
 So we went prancing up hill and down dale,
 In and out of the level and the straight, 100
 By the bit of pleasant byeway, where was harm?
 Still Sol salutes me and the morning laughs :
 I see my grandsire's hoof-prints,—point the spot
 Where he drew rein, slipped saddle, and stabbed knave
 For daring throw gibe—much less, stone—from pale, 105
 Then back, and on, and up with the calvalcade ;
 Just so wend we, now canter, now converse,
 Till, 'mid the jauncing pride and jaunty port,
 Something of a sudden jerks at somebody—

A dagger is out, a flashing cut and thrust, 110
 Because I play some prank my grandsire played,
 And here I sprawl : where is the company ? Gone !
 A trot and a trample ! only I lie trapped,
 Writhe in a certain novel springe just set
 By the good old Pope : I 'm first prize. Warn me ?
 Why? 115
 Apprize me that the law o' the game is changed ?
 Enough that I 'm a warning, as I writhe,
 To all and each my fellows of the file,
 And make law plain henceforward past mistake,
 " For such a prank, death is the penalty ! " 120
 Pope the Five Hundredth . . what do I know or care ?
 Deputes your Eminence and Abateship
 To announce that, twelve hours from this time, he
 needs
 I just essay upon my body and soul
 The virtue of his bran-new engine, prove 125
 Represser of the pranksome ! I 'm the first !
 Thanks. Do you know what teeth you mean to try
 The sharpness of, on this soft neck and throat ?
 I know it,—I have seen and hate it,—ay,
 As you shall, while I tell you : let me talk, 130
 Or leave me, at your pleasure ! talk I must :

What is your visit but my lure to talk ?
 You have a something to disclose?—a smile,
 At end of the forced sternness, means to mock
 The heart-beats here? I call your two hearts stone !
 Is your charge to stay with me till I die ? 136
 Be tacit as your bench, then ! Use your ears,
 I use my tongue : how glibly yours will run
 At pleasant supper-time . . God's curse ! . . to-night
 When all the guests jump up, begin so brisk 140
 " Welcome, his Eminence who shrived the wretch !
 " Now we shall have the Abate's story ! "

Life !

How I could spill this overplus of mine
 Among those hoar-haired, shrunk-shanked, odds and
 ends
 Of body and soul, old age is chewing dry ! 146
 Those windle-straws that stare while purblind death
 Mows here, mows there, makes hay of juicy me,
 And misses, just the bunch of withered weed,
 Would brighten hell and streak its smoke with flame !
 How the life I could shed yet never shrink, 151
 Would drench their stalks with sap like grass in May !
 Is it not terrible, I entreat you, Sirs ?

Such manifold and plenitudinous life,
Prompt at death's menace to give blow for threat, 155
Answer his "Be thou not!" by "Thus I am!"—
Terrible so to be alive yet die?

How I live, how I see! so,—how I speak!
Lucidity of soul unlocks the lips:
I never had the words at will before. 160
How I see all my folly at a glance!
"A man requires a woman and a wife:"
There was my folly; I believed the saw:
I knew that just myself concerned myself,
Yet needs must look for what I seemed to lack, 165
In a woman,—why, the woman's in the man!
Fools we are, how we learn things when too late!
Overmuch life turns round my woman-side;
The male and female in me, mixed before,
Settle of a sudden: I'm my wife outright 170
In this unmanly appetite for truth,
This careless courage as to consequence,
This instantaneous sight through things and through,
This voluble rhetoric, if you please,—'t is she!
Here you have that Pompilia whom I slew, 175
Also the folly for which I slew her!

Fool!

And, fool-like, what is it I wander from?
What, of the sharpness of your iron tooth?
Ah,—that I know the hateful thing : this way. 180
I chanced to stroll forth, many a good year gone,
One warm Spring eve in Rome, and unaware
Looking, mayhap, to count what stars were out,
Came on your huge axe in a frame, that falls
And so cuts off a man's head underneath, 185
Mannaia,—thus we made acquaintance first,
Out of the way, in a bye-part o' the town,
At the Mouth-of-Truth o' the river-side, you know :
One goes by the Capitol : and wherefore coy,
Retiring out of crowded noisy Rome? 190
Because a very little time ago
It had done service, chopped off head from trunk,
Belonging to a fellow whose poor house
The thing had made a point to stand before.
Felice Whatsoever-was-the-name 195
Who stabled buffaloes and so gained bread,
(Our clowns unyoke them in the ground hard by)
And, after use of much improper speech,
Had struck at Duke Some-title-or-other's face,
Because he kidnapped, carried away and kept 200

Felice's sister that would sit and sing
I' the filthy doorway while she plaited fringe
To deck the brutes with,—on their gear it goes,—
The good girl with the velvet in her voice.
So did the Duke, so did Felice, so 205
Did Justice, intervening with her axe.
There the man-mutilating engine stood
At ease, both gay and grim, like a Swiss guard
Off duty,—purified itself as well,
Getting dry, sweet and proper for next week,— 210
And doing incidental good, 't was hoped
To the rough lesson-lacking populace
Who now and then, forsooth, must right their wrongs!
There stood the twelve-foot-square of scaffold, railed
Considerately round to elbow-height: 215
(Suppose an officer should tumble thence
And sprain his ankle and be lame a month,
Through starting when the axe fell and head too?)
Railed likewise were the steps whereby 't was reached.
All of it painted red: red, in the midst, 220
Ran up two narrow tall beams barred across,
Since from the summit, some twelve feet to reach,
The iron plate with the sharp shearing edge
Had . . slammed, jerked, shot or slid,—I shall find which!

There it lay quiet, fast in its fit place, 225
The wooden half-moon collar, now eclipsed
By the blade which blocked its curvature : apart,
The other half,—the under half-moon board
Which, helped by this, completes a neck's embrace,—
Joined to a sort of desk that wheels aside 230
Out of the way when done with,—down you kneel,
In you 're wheeled, over you the other drops,
Tight you are clipped, whiz, there 's the blade on you,
Out trundles body, down flops head on floor,
And where 's your soul gone? That, too, I shall find !
This kneeling-place was red, red, never fear ! 236
But only slimy-like with paint, not blood,
For why? a decent pitcher stood at hand,
A broad dish to hold sawdust, and a broom
By some unnamed utensil,—scraper-rake,— 240
Each with a conscious air of duty done.
Underneath, loungers,—boys and some few men,—
Discoursed this platter and the other tool,
Just as, when grooms tie up and dress a steed,
Boys lounge and look on, and elucubrate 245
What the round brush is used for, what the square,—
So was explained—to me the skill-less man—
The manner of the grooming for next world

Undergone by Felice What's-his-name.

There 's no such lovely month in Rome as May— 250

May's crescent is no half-moon of red plank,

And came now tilting o'er the wave i' the west,

One greenish-golden sea, right 'twixt those bars

Of the engine—I began acquaintance with,

Understood, hated, hurried from before, 255

To have it out of sight and cleanse my soul!

Here it is all again, conserved for use :

Twelve hours hence I may know more, not hate worse.

That young May-moon-month! Devils of the deep!

Was not a Pope then Pope as much as now? 260

Used not he chirrup o'er the Merry Tales,

Chuckle,—his nephew so exact the wag

To play a jealous cullion such a trick

As wins the wife i' the pleasant story! Well?

Why do things change? Wherefore is Rome un-Romed?

I tell you, ere Felice's corpse was cold, 266

The Duke, that night, threw wide his palace-doors,

Received the compliments o' the quality,

For justice done him,—bowed and smirked his best,

And in return passed round a pretty thing, 270

A portrait of Felice's sister's self,

Florid old rogue Albano's masterpiece,
 As—better than virginity in rags—
 Bouncing Europa on the back o' the bull :
 They laughed and took their road the safelier home.
 Ah, but times change, there 's quite another Pope, 276
 I do the Duke's deed, take Felice's place,
 And, being no Felice, lout and clout,
 Stomach but ill the phrase " I lose my head !"
 How euphemistic ! Lose what ? Lose your ring, 280
 Your snuff-box, tablets, kerchief !—but, your head ?
 I learnt the process at an early age ;
 'T was useful knowledge in those same old days,
 To know the way a head is set on neck.
 My fencing-master urged " Would you excel ? 285
 " Rest not content with mere bold give-and-guard,
 " Nor pink the antagonist somehow-anyhow,—
 " See me dissect a little, and know your game !
 " Only anatomy makes a thrust the thing."
 Oh Cardinal, those lithe live necks of ours ! 290
 Here go the vertebræ, here's *Atlas*, here
Axis, and here the symphyses stop short,
 So wisely and well,—as, o'er a corpse, we cant,—
 And here 's the silver cord which . . . what 's our word ?
 Depends from the gold bowl, which loosed (not " lost ")

Lets us from heaven to hell,—one chop, we 're loose !
 “ And not much pain i' the process,” quoth the sage :
 Who told him? Not Felice's ghost, I think !
 Such “ losing ” is scarce Mother Nature's mode.
 She fain would have cord ease itself away, 300
 Worn to a thread by threescore years and ten,
 Snap while we slumber : that seems bearable :
 I 'm told one clot of blood extravasate
 Ends one as certainly as Roland's sword,—
 One drop of lymph suffused proves Oliver's mace,— 305
 Intruding, either of the pleasant pair,
 On the arachnoid tunic of my brain.
 That 's Nature's way of loosing cord !—but Art,
 How of Art's process with the engine here ?
 When bowl and cord alike are crushed across, 310
 Bored between, bruised through? Why, if Fagon's self,
 The French Court's pride, that famed practitioner,
 Would pass his cold pale lightning of a knife,
 Pistoja-ware, adroit 'twixt joint and joint,
 With just a “ See how facile, gentlefolks ! ”— 315
 The thing were not so bad to bear ! Brute force
 Cuts as he comes, breaks in, breaks on, breaks out
 O' the hard and soft of you : is that the same ?
 A lithe snake thrids the hedge, makes throb no leaf :

A heavy ox sets chest to brier and branch, 320
 Bursts somehow through, and leaves one hideous hole
 Behind him !

And why, why must this needs be ?

Oh, if men were but good ! They are not good,
 Nowise like Peter : people called him rough, 325
 But if, as I left Rome, I spoke the Saint,
 —“ *Petrus, quo vadis ?* ”—doubtless, I should hear,
 “ To free the prisoner and forgive his fault !
 “ I plucked the absolute dead from God’s own bar,
 “ And raised up Dorcas,—why not rescue thee ? ” 330
 What would cost one such nullifying word ?
 If Innocent succeeds to Peter’s place,
 Let him think Peter’s thought, speak Peter’s speech !
 I say, he is bound to it : friends, how say you ?
 Concede I be all one bloodguiltiness 335
 And mystery of murder in the flesh,
 Why should that fact keep the Pope’s mouth shut fast ?
 He execrates my crime,—good !—sees hell yawn
 One inch from the red plank’s end which I press,—
 Nothing is better ! What’s the consequence ? 340
 How does a Pope proceed that knows his cue ?
 Why, leaves me linger out my minute here,

Since close on death come judgment and the doom,
 Nor cribs at dawn its pittance from a sheep
 Destined ere dewfall to be butcher's-meat ! 345
 Think, Sirs, if I had done you any harm,
 And you require the natural revenge,
 Suppose, and so intend to poison me,
 —Just as you take and slip into my draught
 The paperful of powder that clears scores, 350
 You notice on my brow a certain blue :
 How you both overset the wine at once !
 How you both smile ! “ Our enemy has the plague !
 “ Twelve hours hence he 'll be scraping his bones bare
 “ Of that intolerable flesh, and die, 355
 “ Frenzied with pain : no need for poison here !
 “ Step aside and enjoy the spectacle ! ”
 Tender for souls are you, Pope Innocent !
 Christ 's maxim is—one soul outweighs the world :
 Respite me, save a soul, then, curse the world ! 360
 “ No,” venerable sire, I hear you smirk,
 “ No : for Christ's gospel changes names, not things,
 “ Renews the obsolete, does nothing more !
 “ Our fire-new gospel is retinkered law,
 “ Our mercy, justice,—Jove 's rechristened God,— 365
 “ Nay, whereas, in the popular conceit,

" 'T is pity that old harsh Law somehow limps,
 " Lingers on earth, although Law's day be done,—
 " Else would benignant Gospel interpose,
 " Not furtively as now, but bold and frank 370
 " O'erflutter us with healing in her wings,—
 " Law is all harshness, Gospel were all love!—
 " We like to put it, on the contrary,—
 " Gospel takes up the rod which Law lets fall ;
 " Mercy is vigilant when justice sleeps ; 375
 " Does Law let Guido taste the Gospel-grace ?
 " The secular arm allow the spiritual power
 " To act for once?—what compliment so fine
 " As that the Gospel handsomely be harsh,
 " Thrust back Law's victim on the nice and coy ?" 380
 Yes, you do say so,—else you would forgive
 Me, whom Law dares not touch but tosses you !
 Do n't think to put on the professional face !
 You know what I know,—casuists as you are,
 Each nerve must creep, each hair start, sting and stand,
 At such illogical inconsequence ! 386
 Dear my friends, do but see ! A murder 's tried,
 There are two parties to the cause : I 'm one,
 —Defend myself, as somebody must do :
 I have the best o' the battle : that 's a fact, 390

Simple fact,—fancies find no place beside :
 What though half Rome condemned me? Half approved :
 And, none disputes, the luck is mine at last,
 All Rome, i' the main, acquits me : whereupon
 What has the Pope to ask but " How finds Law ?" 395
 " I find," replies Law, " I have erred this while :
 " Guilty or guiltless, Guido proves a priest,
 " No layman : he is therefore yours, not mine :
 " I bound him : loose him, you whose will is Christ's !"
 And now what does this Vicar of the Lord, 400
 Shepherd o' the flock,—one of whose charge bleats sore
 For crook's help from the quag wherein it drowns ?
 Law suffers him put forth the crumpled end,—
 His pleasure is to turn staff, use the point,
 And thrust the shuddering sheep he calls a wolf, 405
 Back and back, down and down to where hell gapes !
 " Guiltless," cries Law—" Guilty" corrects the Pope !
 " Guilty," for the whim's sake ! " Guilty," he somehow
 thinks,
 And anyhow says : 't is truth ; he dares not lie !
 Others should do the lying. That 's the cause 410
 Brings you both here : I ought in decency
 Confess to you that I deserve my fate,
 Am guilty, as the Pope thinks,—ay, to the end,

Keep up the jest, lie on, lie ever, lie
 I' the latest gasp of me ! What reason, Sirs ? 415
 Because to-morrow will succeed to-day
 For you, though not for me : and if I stick
 Still to the truth, declare with my last breath,
 I die an innocent and murdered man,—
 Why, there 's the tongue of Rome will wag a-pace 420
 This time to-morrow,—do n't I hear the talk !
 “ So, to the last he proved impenitent ?
 “ Pagans have said as much of martyred saints !
 “ Law demurred, washed her hands of the whole case.
 “ Prince Somebody said this, Duke Something, that. 425
 “ Doubtless the man 's dead, dead enough, do n't
 fear !
 “ But, hang it, what if there have been a spice,
 “ A touch of . . eh ? You see, the Pope 's so old,
 “ Some of us add, obtuse,—age never slips
 “ The chance of shoving youth to face death first ! ” 430
 And so on. Therefore to suppress such talk
 You two come here, entreat I tell you lies,
 And end, the edifying way. I end,
 Telling the truth ! Your self-styled shepherd thieves !
 A thief—and how thieves hate the wolves we know : 435
 Damage to theft, damage to thrift, all 's one !

The red hand is sworn foe of the black jaw !
 That 's only natural, that 's right enough :
 But why the wolf should compliment the thief
 With the shepherd's title, bark out life in thanks, 440
 And, spiteless, lick the prong that spits him,—eh,
 Cardinal? My Abate, scarcely thus !
 There, let my sheepskin-garb, a curse on 't, go—
 Leave my teeth free if I must show my shag !
 Repent? What good shall follow? If I pass 445
 Twelve hours repenting, will that fact hook fast
 The thirteenth at the horrid dozen's end ?
 If I fall forthwith at your feet, gnash, tear,
 Foam, rave, to give your story the due grace,
 Will that assist the engine half-way back 450
 Into its hiding-house?—boards, shaking now,
 Bone against bone, like some old skeleton bat
 That wants, now winter 's dead, to wake and prey !
 Will howling put the spectre back to sleep ?
 Ah, but I misconceive your object, Sirs ! 455
 Since I want new life like the creature,—life
 Being done with here, begins i' the world away :
 I shall next have “ Come, mortals, and be judged ! ”
 There 's but a minute betwixt this and then :
 So, quick, be sorry since it saves my soul ! 460

Sirs, truth shall save it, since no lies assist !
 Hear the truth, you, whatever you style yourselves,
 Civilization and society !
 Come, one good grapple, I with all the world !
 Dying in cold blood is the desperate thing ; 465
 The angry heart explodes, bears off in blaze
 The indignant soul, and I 'm combustion-ripe.
 Why, you intend to do your worst with me !
 That 's in your eyes ! You dare no more than death,
 And mean no less. I must make up my mind ! 470
 So Pietro,—when I chased him here and there,
 Morsel by morsel cut away the life
 I loathed,—cried for just respite to confess
 And save his soul : much respite did I grant !
 Why grant me respite who deserve my doom ? 475
 Me—who engaged to play a prize, fight you,
 Knowing your arms, and foil you, trick for trick,
 At rapier-fence, your match and, may be, more.
 I knew that if I chose sin certain sins,
 Solace my lusts out of the regular way 480
 Prescribed me, I should find you in the path,
 Have to try skill with a redoubted foe ;
 You would lunge, I would parry, and make end.
 At last, occasion of a murder comes :

We cross blades, I, for all my brag, break guard, 485
 And in goes the cold iron at my breast,
 Out at my back, and end is made of me.
 You stand confessed the adroiter swordsman,—ay,
 But on your triumph you increase, it seems,
 Want more of me than lying flat on face : 490
 I ought to raise my ruined head, allege
 Not simply I pushed worse blade o' the pair,
 But my antagonist dispensed with steel !
 There was no passage of arms, you looked me low,
 With brow and eye abolished cut-and-thrust 495
 Nor used the vulgar weapon ! This chance scratch,
 This incidental hurt, this sort of hole
 I' the heart of me ? I stumbled, got it so !
 Fell on my own sword as a bungler may !
 Yourself proscribe such heathen tools, and trust 500
 To the naked virtue : it was virtue stood
 Unarmed and awed me,—on my brow there burned
 Crime out so plainly, intolerably, red,
 That I was fain to cry—“ Down to the dust
 “ With me, and bury there brow, brand and all ! ” 505
 Law had essayed the adventure,—but what 's Law ?
 Morality exposed the Gorgon-shield !
 Morality and Religion conquer me.

If Law sufficed would you come here, entreat
I supplement law, and confess forsooth? 510
Did not the Trial show things plain enough?
“ Ah, but a word of the man’s very self
“ Would somehow put the keystone in its place
“ And crown the arch !” Then take the word you want !

I say that, long ago, when things began, 515
All the world made agreement, such and such
Were pleasure-giving profit-bearing acts,
But henceforth extra-legal, nor to be :
You must not kill the man whose death would please
And profit you, unless his life stop yours 520
Plainly, and need so be put aside :
Get the thing by a public course, by law,
Only no private bloodshed as of old !
All of us, for the good of every one,
Renounced such licence and conformed to law : 525
Who breaks law, breaks pact, therefore, helps himself
To pleasure and profit over and above the due,
And must pay forfeit,—pain beyond his share :
For pleasure is the sole good in the world,
Anyone’s pleasure turns to someone’s pain, 530
So, let law watch for everyone,—say we,

Who call things wicked that give too much joy,
 And nickname the reprisal, envy makes,
 Punishment : quite right ! thus the world goes round.
 I, being well aware such pact there was, 535
 Who in my time have found advantage too
 In law's observance and crime's penalty,—
 Who, but for wholesome fear law bred in friends,
 Had doubtless given example long ago,
 Furnished forth some friend's pleasure with my pain,
 And, by my death, pieced out his scanty life,— 541
 I could not, for that foolish life of me,
 Help risking law's infringement,—I broke bond,
 And needs must pay price,—wherefore, here 's my head,
 Flung with a flourish ! But, repentance too? 545
 But pure and simple sorrow for law's breach
 Rather than blunderer's-ineptitude ?
 Cardinal, no ! Abate, scarcely thus !
 'T is the fault, not that I dared try a fall
 With Law and straightway am found undermost, 550
 But that I fail to see, above man's law,
 God's precept you, the Christians recognize ?
 Colly my cow ! Do n't fidget, Cardinal !
 Abate, cross your breast and count your beads
 And exorcize the devil, for here he stands 555

And stiffens in the bristly nape of neck,
 Daring you drive him hence ! You, Christians both ?
 I say, if ever was such faith at all
 Born in the world, by your community
 Suffered to live its little tick of time, 560
 'T is dead of age now, ludicrously dead ;
 Honour its ashes, if you be discreet,
 In epitaph only ! For, concede its death,
 Allow extinction, you may boast unchecked
 What feats the thing did in a crazy land 565
 At a fabulous epoch,—treat your faith, that way,
 Just as you treat your relics : “ Here ’s a shred
 “ Of saintly flesh, a scrap of blessed bone,
 “ Raised King Cophetua, who was dead, to life
 “ In Mesopotamy twelve centuries since, 570
 “ Such was its virtue ! ”—twangs the Sacristan,
 Holding the shrine-box up, with hands like feet
 Because of gout in every finger-joint :
 Does he bethink him to reduce one knob,
 Allay one twinge by touching what he vaunts ? 575
 I think he half uncrooks fist to catch fee,
 But, for the grace, the quality of cure,—
 Cophetua was the man put that to proof !
 Not otherwise, your faith is shrined and shown

And shamed at once : you banter while you bow ! . 580
Do you dispute this? Come, a monster-laugh,
A madman's laugh, allowed his Carnival
Later ten days than when all Rome, but he,
Laughed at the candle-contest : mine 's alight,
'T is just it sputter till the puff o' the Pope 585
End it to-morrow and the world turn Ash.
Come, thus I wave a wand and bring to pass
In a moment, in the twinkle of an eye,
What but that—feigning everywhere grows fact,
Professors turn possessors, realize 590
The faith they play with as a fancy now,
And bid it operate, have full effect
On every circumstance of life, to-day,
In Rome,—faith's flow set free at fountain-head !
Now, you 'll own, at this present when I speak, 595
Before I work the wonder, there 's no man
Woman or child in Rome, faith's fountain-head,
But might, if each were minded, realize
Conversely unbelief, faith's opposite—
Set it to work on life unflinchingly, 600
Yet give no symptom of an outward change :
Why should things change because men disbelieve ?
What's incompatible, in the whited tomb,

With bones and rottenness one inch below?
 What saintly act is done in Rome to-day 605
 But might be prompted by the devil,—“is”
 I say not,—“has been, and again may be,”—
 I do say, full i' the face o' the crucifix
 You try to stop my mouth with! Off with it!
 Look in your own heart, if your soul have eyes! 610
 You shall see reason why, though faith were fled,
 Unbelief still might work the wires and move
 Man, the machine, to play a faithful part.
 Preside your college, Cardinal, in your cape,
 Or,—having got above his head, grown Pope,— 615
 Abate, gird your loins and wash my feet!
 Do you suppose I am at loss at all
 Why you crook, why you cringe, why fast or feast?
 Praise, blame, sit, stand, lie or go!— all of it,
 In each of you, purest unbelief may prompt, 620
 And wit explain to who has eyes to see.
 But, lo, I wave wand, make the false the true!
 Here 's Rome believes in Christianity!
 What an explosion, how the fragments fly
 Of what was surface, mask and make-believe! 625
 Begin now,—look at this Pope's-halberdier
 In wasp-like black and yellow foolery!

He, doing duty at the corridor,
Wakes from a muse and stands convinced of sin !
Down he flings halbert, leaps the passage-length, 630
Pushes into the presence, pantingly
Submits the extreme peril of the case
To the Pope's self,—whom in the world beside ?—
And the Pope breaks talk with ambassador,
Bids aside bishop, wills the whole world wait 635
Till he secure that prize, outweighs the world,
A soul, relieve the sentry of his qualm !
His Altitude the Referendary,—
Robed right, and ready for the usher's word
To pay devoir,—is, of all times, just then 640
'Ware of a master-stroke of argument
Will cut the spinal cord . . . ugh, ugh ! . . . I mean,
Paralyse Molinism for evermore !
Straight he leaves lobby, trundles, two and two,
Down steps, to reach home, write if but a word 645
Shall end the impudence : he leaves who likes
Go pacify the Pope : there's Christ to serve !
How otherwise would men display their zeal ?
If the same sentry had the least surmise
A powder-barrel 'neath the pavement lay 650
In neighbourhood with what might prove a match,

Meant to blow sky-high Pope and presence both—
Would he not break through courtiers, rank and file,
Bundle up, bear off and save body so,
O' the Pope, no matter for his priceless soul? 655
There's no fool's-freak here, nought to soundly swinge,
Only a man in earnest, you'll so praise
And pay and prate about, that earth shall ring!
Had thought possessed the Referendary
His jewel-case at home was left ajar, 660
What would be wrong in running, robes awry,
To be beforehand with the pilferer?
What talk then of indecent haste? Which means,
That both these, each in his degree, would do
Just that,—for a comparative nothing's sake, 665
And thereby gain approval and reward,—
Which, done for what Christ says is worth the world,
Procures the doer curses, cuffs and kicks.
I call such difference 'twixt act and act,
Sheer lunacy unless your truth on lip 670
Be recognized a lie in heart of you!
How do you all act, promptly or in doubt,
When there's a guest poisoned at supper-time
And he sits chatting on with spot on cheek?
“ Pluck him by the skirt, and round him in the ears, 675

" Have at him by the beard, warn anyhow !"
 Good, and this other friend that 's cheat and thief
 And dissolute,—go stop the devil's feast,
 Withdraw him from the imminent hell-fire !
 Why, for your life, you dare not tell your friend 680
 " You lie, and I admonish you for Christ !"
 Who yet dare seek that same man at the Mass
 To warn him—on his knees, and tinkle near,—
 He left a cask a-tilt, a tap unturned,
 The Trebbian running : what a grateful jump 685
 Out of the Church rewards your vigilance !
 Perform that self-same service just a thought
 More maladroitly,—since a bishop sits
 At function !—and he budges not, bites lip,—
 " You see my case : how can I quit my post ? 690
 " He has an eye to any such default.
 " See to it, neighbour, I beseech your love !"
 He and you know the relative worth of things,
 What is permissible or inopportune.
 Contort your brows ! You know I speak the truth : 695
 Gold is called gold, and dross called dross, i' the Book :
 Gold you let lie and dross pick up and prize !
 —Despite your muster of some fifty monks
 And nuns a-maundering here and mumping there,

Who could, and on occasion would, spurn dross, 700
 Clutch gold, and prove their faith a fact so far,—
 I grant you! Fifty times the number squeak
 And gibber in the madhouse—firm of faith,
 This fellow, that his nose supports the moon,
 The other, that his straw hat crowns him Pope: 705
 Does that prove all the world outside insane?
 Do fifty miracle-mongers match the mob
 That acts on the frank faithless principle,
 Born-baptized-and-bred Christian-atheists, each
 With just as much a right to judge as you,— 710
 As many senses in his soul, or nerves
 I' neck of him as I,—whom, soul and sense,
 Neck and nerve, you abolish presently,—
 I being the unit in creation now
 Who pay the Maker, in this speech of mine, 715
 A creature's duty, spend my last of breath
 In bearing witness, even by my worst fault
 To the creature's obligation, absolute,
 Perpetual: my worst fault protests, "The faith
 " Claims all of me: I would give all she claims, 720
 " But for a spice of doubt: the risk 's too rash:
 " Double or quits, I play, but, all or nought,
 " Exceeds my courage: therefore, I descend

" To the next faith with no dubiety—
 " Faith in the present life, made last as long 725
 " And prove as full of pleasure as may hap,
 " Whatever pain it cause the world." I 'm wrong?
 I 've had my life, whate'er I lose : I 'm right?
 I 've got the single good there was to gain.
 Entire faith, or else complete unbelief,— 730
 Aught between has my loathing and contempt,
 Mine and God's also, doubtless : ask yourself,
 Cardinal, where and how you like a man !
 Why, either with your feet upon his head,
 Confessed your caudatory, or at large 735
 The stranger in the crowd who caps to you
 But keeps his distance,—why should he presume?
 You want no hanger-on and dropper-off,
 Now yours, and now not yours but quite his own,
 According as the sky looks black or bright. 740
 Just so I capped to and kept off from faith—
 You promised trudge behind through fair and foul,
 Yet leave i' the lurch at the first spit of rain.
 Who holds to faith whenever rain begins?
 What does the father when his son lies dead, 745
 The merchant when his money-bags take wing,
 The politician whom a rival ousts?

No case but has its conduct, faith prescribes :
 Where 's the obedience that shall edify?
 Why, they laugh frankly in the face of faith 750
 And take the natural course,—this rends his hair
 Because his child is taken to God's breast,
 That gnashes teeth and raves at loss of trash
 Which rust corrupts and thieves break through and steal,
 And this, enabled to inherit earth 755
 Through meekness, curses till your blood runs cold !
 Down they all drop to my low level, ease
 Heart upon dungy earth that 's warm and soft,
 And let who will, attempt the altitudes.
 We have the prodigal son of heavenly sire, 760
 Turning his nose up at the fatted calf,
 Fain to fill belly with the husks we swine
 Did eat by born depravity of taste !

Enough of the hypocrites. But you, Sirs, you—
 Who never budged from litter where I lay, 765
 And buried snout i' the draff-box while I fed,
 Cried amen to my creed's one article—
 " Get pleasure, 'scape pain,—give your preference
 " To the immediate good, for time is brief,
 " And death ends good and ill and everything : 770

“ What ’s got is gained, what ’s gained soon is gained twice,

“ And,—inasmuch as faith gains most,—feign faith !”

So did we brother-like pass word about :

—You, now,—like bloody drunkards but half-drunk,

Who fool men yet perceive men find them fools, 775

And that a titter gains the gravest mouth,—

O’ the sudden you must needs re-introduce

Solemnity, must sober undue mirth

By a blow dealt your boon companion here

Who, using the old licence, dreamed of harm 780

No more than snow in harvest : yet it falls !

You check the merriment effectually

By pushing your abrupt machine i’ the midst,

Making me Rome’s example : blood for wine !

The general good needs that you chop and change ! 785

I may dislike the hocus-pocus,—Rome,

The laughter-loving people, won’t they stare

Chap-fallen !—while serious natures sermonize

“ The magistrate, he beareth not the sword

“ In vain ; who sins may taste its edge, we see !” 790

Why my sin, drunkards ? Where have I abused

Liberty, scandalized you all so much ?

Who called me, who crooked finger till I came,

Fool that I was, to join companionship ?

I knew my own mind, meant to live my life, 795
Elude your envy, or else make a stand,
Take my own part and sell you my life dear :
But it was " Fie ! No prejudice in the world
" To the proper manly instinct ! Cast your lot
" Into our lap, one genius ruled our births, 800
" We 'll compass joy by concert ; take with us
" The regular irregular way i' the wood ;
" You 'll miss no game through riding breast by breast,
" In this preserve, the Church's park and pale,
" Rather than outside where the world is waste !" 805
Come, if you said not that, did you say this ?
Give plain and terrible warning, " Live, enjoy ?
" Such life begins in death and ends in hell !
" Dare you bid us assist you to your sins
" Who hurry sin and sinners from the earth ? 810
" No such delight for us, why then for you ?
" Leave earth, seek heaven or find its opposite !"
Had you so warned me, not in lying words
But veritable deeds with tongues of flame,
That had been fair, that might have struck a man, 815
Silenced the squabble between soul and sense,
Compelled him make his mind up, take one course
Or the other, peradventure !—wrong or right,

Foolish or wise, you would have been at least
 Sincere, no question,—forced me choose, indulge 820
 Or else renounce my instincts, still play wolf
 Or find my way submissive to the fold,
 Be red-crossed on the fleece, one sheep the more.
 But you as good as bade me wear sheep's wool
 Over wolf's skin, suck blood and hide the noise 825
 By mimicry of something like a bleat,—
 Whence it comes that because, despite my care,
 Because I smack my tongue too loud for once,
 Drop baaing, here 's the village up in arms !
 Have at the wolf's throat, you who hate the breed ! 830
 Oh, were it only open yet to choose—
 One little time more—whether I 'd be free
 Your foe, or subsidized your friend forsooth !
 Should not you get a growl through the white fangs
 In answer to your beckoning ! Cardinal, 835
 Abate, managers o' the multitude,
 I 'd turn your gloved hands to account, be sure !
 You should manipulate the coarse rough mob :
 'T is you I 'd deal directly with, not them,—
 Using your fears : why touch the thing myself 840
 When I could see you hunt and then cry " Shares !
 " Quarter the carcass or we quarrel ; come,

“ Here ’s the world ready to see justice done ! ”

Oh, it had been a desperate game, but game

Wherein the winner’s chance were worth the pains 845

To try conclusions !—at the worst, what’s worse

Than this Mannaia-machine, each minute’s talk,

Helps push an inch the nearer me? Fool, fool !

You understand me and forgive, sweet Sirs ?

I blame you, tear my hair and tell my woe— 850

All’s but a flourish, figure of rhetoric !

One must try each expedient to save life.

One makes fools look foolisher fifty-fold

By putting in their place the wise like you

To take the full force of an argument 855

Would buffet their stolidity in vain.

If you should feel aggrieved by the mere wind

O’ the blow that means to miss you and maul them,

That’s my success ! Is it not folly, now,

To say with folks, “ A plausible defence— 860

“ We see through notwithstanding, and reject ? ”

Reject the plausible they do, these fools,

Who never even make pretence to show

One point beyond its plausibility

In favour of the best belief they hold ! 865

" Saint Somebody-or-other raised the dead : "
 Did he ? How do you come to know as much ?
 " Know it, what need ? The story 's plausible,
 " Avouched for by a martyrologist,
 " And why should good men sup on cheese and leeks
 " On such a saint's day, if there were no saint ? " 871
 I praise the wisdom of these fools, and straight
 Tell them my story—" plausible, but false ! "
 False, to be sure ! What else can story be
 That runs—a young wife tired of an old spouse, 875
 Found a priest whom she fled away with,—both
 Took their full pleasure in the two-days' flight,
 Which a grey-headed greyer-hearted pair,
 (Whose best boast was, their life had been a lie)
 Helped for the love they bore all liars. Oh, 880
 Here incredulity begins ! Indeed ?
 Allow then, were no one point strictly true,
 There 's that i' the tale might seem like truth at least
 To the unlucky husband,—jaundiced patch,—
 Jealousy maddens people, why not him ? 885
 Say, he was maddened, so, forgivable !
 Humanity pleads that though the wife were true,
 The priest true, and the pair of liars true,
 They might seem false to one man in the world !

A thousand gnats make up a serpent's sting, 890
And many sly soft stimulants to wrath
Compose a formidable wrong at last,
That gets called easily by some one name
Not applicable to the single parts,
And so draws down a general revenge, 895
Excessive if you take crime, fault by fault.
Jealousy! I have known a score of plays,
Were listened to and laughed at in my time
As like the everyday-life on all sides,
Wherein the husband, mad as a March hare, 900
Suspected all the world contrived his shame;
What did the wife? The wife kissed both eyes blind,
Explained away ambiguous circumstance,
And while she held him captive by the hand,
Crowned his head,—you know what's the mockery,—
By half her body behind the curtain. That's 906
Nature now! That's the subject of a piece
I saw in Vallombrosa Convent, made
Expressly to teach men what marriage was!
But say "Just so did I misapprehend!" 910
Or "Just so she deceived me to my face!"
And that's pretence too easily seen through!
All those eyes of all husbands in all plays,

At stare like one expanded peacock-tail,
 Are laughed at for pretending to be keen 915
 While horn-blind : but the moment I step forth—
 Oh, I must needs o' the sudden prove a lynx
 And look the heart, that stone-wall, through and through !
 Such an eye, God's may be,—not yours nor mine.

Yes, presently . . . what hour is fleeting now ? 920
 When you cut earth away from under me,
 I shall be left alone with, pushed beneath
 Some such an apparitional dread orb ;
 I fancy it go filling up the void
 Above my mote-self it devours, or what 925
 Immensity please wreak on nothingness.
 Just so I felt once, couching through the dark,
 Hard by Vittiano ; young I was, and gay,
 And wanting to trap fieldfares : first a spark
 Tipped a bent, as a mere dew-globule might 930
 Any stiff grass-stalk on the meadow,—this
 Grew fiercer, flamed out full, and proved the sun.
 What do I want with proverbs, precepts here ?
 Away with man ! What shall I say to God ?
 This, if I find the tongue and keep the mind— 935
 “ Do Thou wipe out the being of me, and smear

" This soul from off Thy white of things, I blot !
 " I am one huge and sheer mistake,—whose fault ?
 " Not mine at least, who did not make myself !"
 Someone declares my wife excused me so ! 940
 Perhaps she knew what argument to use.
 Grind your teeth, Cardinal, Abate, writhe !
 What else am I to cry out in my rage,
 Unable to repent one particle
 O' the past ? Oh, how I wish some cold wise man
 Would dig beneath the surface which you scrape, 946
 Deal with the depths, pronounce on my desert
 Groundedly ! I want simple sober sense,
 That asks, before it finishes with a dog,
 Who taught the dog that trick you hang him for ? 950
 You both persist to call that act a crime,
 Sense would call . . . yes, I do assure you, Sirs, . . .
 A blunder ! At the worst, I stood in doubt
 On cross-road, took one path of many paths :
 It leads to the red thing, we all see now, 955
 But nobody at first saw one primrose
 In bank, one singing-bird in bush, the less,
 To warn from wayfare : let me prove you that !
 Put me back to the cross-road, start afresh !
 Advise me when I take the first false step ! 960

Give me my wife : how should I use my wife,
 Love her or hate her? Prompt my action now !
 There she stands, there she is alive and pale,
 The thirteen-years'-old child, with milk for blood,
 Pompilia Comparini, as at first, 965
 Which first is only four brief years ago !
 I stand too in the little ground-floor room
 O' the father's house at Via Vittoria : see !
 Her so-called mother,—one arm round the waist
 O' the child to keep her from the toys—let fall, 970
 At wonder I can live yet look so grim,—
 Ushers her in, with deprecating wave
 Of the other,—there she fronts me loose, at large,
 Held only by the mother's finger-tip—
 Struck dumb, for she was white enough before ! 975
 She eyes me with those frightened balls of black,
 As heifer—the old simile comes pat—
 Eyes tremblingly the altar and the priest :
 The amazed look, all one insuppressive prayer,—
 Might she but be set free as heretofore, 980
 Have this cup leave her lips unblistered, bear
 Any cross anywhither anyhow,
 So but alone, so but apart from me !
 You are touched? So am I, quite otherwise,

If 't is with pity. I resent my wrong, 985
 Being a man : we only show man's soul
 Through man's flesh, she sees mine, it strikes her thus !
 Is that attractive ? To a youth perhaps—
 Calf-creature, one-part boy to three-parts girl,
 To whom it is a flattering novelty 990
 That he, men use to motion from their path,
 Can thus impose, thus terrify in turn
 A chit whose terror shall be changed apace
 To bliss unbearable when, grace and glow,
 Prowess and pride descend the throne and touch 995
 Esther in all that pretty tremble, cured
 By the dove o' the sceptre ! But myself am old,
 O' the wane at least, in all things : what do you say
 To her who frankly thus confirms my doubt ?
 I am past the prime, I scare the woman-world, 1000
 Done-with that way : you like this piece of news ?
 A little saucy rose-bud minx can strike
 Death-damp into the breast of doughty king
 Though 't were French Louis,—soul I understand,—
 Saying, by gesture of repugnance, just 1005
 “ Sire, you are regal, puissant and so forth,
 “ But—young you have been, are not, nor will be !”
 In vain the mother nods, winks, bustles up

" Count, girls incline to mature worth like you !
 " As for Pompilia, what 's flesh, fish or fowl 1010
 " To one who apprehends no difference,
 " And would accept you even were you old
 " As you are . . . youngish by her father's side?
 " Trim but your beard a little, thin your bush
 " Of eyebrow ; and for presence, portliness 1015
 " And decent gravity, you beat a boy !"
 Deceive you for a second, if you may,
 In presence of the child that so loves age,
 Whose neck writhes, cords itself against your kiss,
 Whose hand you wring stark, rigid with despair ! 1020
 Well, I resent this ; I am young in soul,
 Nor old in body,—thews and sinews here,—
 Though the vile surface be not smooth as once,—
 Far beyond the first wheelwork that went wrong
 Through the untempered iron ere 't was proof : 1025
 I am the steel man worth ten times the crude,—
 Would woman see what this declines to see,
 Declines to say " I see,"—the officious word
 That makes the thing, pricks on the soul to shoot
 New fire into the half-used cinder, flesh ! 1030
 Therefore 't is she begins with wronging me,
 Who cannot but begin with hating her.

Our marriage follows : there we stand again !
 Why do I laugh ? Why, in the very gripe
 O' the jaws of death's gigantic skull do I 1035
 Grin back his grin, make sport of my own pangs ?
 Why from each clashing of his molars, ground
 To make the devil bread from out my grist,
 Leaps out a spark of mirth, a hellish toy ?
 Take notice we are lovers in a church, 1040
 Waiting the sacrament to make us one
 And happy ! Just as bid, she bears herself,
 Comes and kneels, rises, speaks, is silent,—goes :
 So have I brought my horse, by word and blow,
 To stand stock-still and front the fire he dreads. 1045
 How can I other than remember this,
 Resent the very obedience ? Gain thereby ?
 Yes, I do gain my end and have my will,—
 Thanks to whom ? When the mother speaks the word,
 She obeys it—even to enduring me ! 1050
 There had been compensation in revolt—
 Revolt's to quell : but martyrdom rehearsed,
 But predetermined saintship for the sake
 O' the mother ?—" Go !" thought I, " we meet again !"
 Pass the next weeks of dumb contented death, 1055
 She lives,—wakes up, installed in house and home,

Is mine, mine all day-long, all night-long mine.
 Good folks begin at me with open mouth
 " Now, at least, reconcile the child to life !
 " Study and make her love . . . that is, endure 1060
 " The . . . hem ! the . . . all of you though somewhat
 old,
 " Till it amount to something, in her eye,
 " As good as love, better a thousand times,—
 " Since nature helps the woman in such strait,
 " Makes passiveness her pleasure : failing which, 1065
 " What if you give up boys' and girls' fools'-play
 " And go on to wise friendship all at once ?
 " Those boys and girls kiss themselves cold, you know,
 " Toy themselves tired and slink aside full soon
 " To friendship, as they name satiety : 1070
 " Thither go you and wait their coming ! " Thanks,
 Considerate advisers,—but, fair play !
 Had you and I but started fair at first,
 We, keeping fair, might reach it, neck by neck,
 This blessed goal, whenever fate so please : 1075
 But why am I to miss the daisied mile
 The course begins with, why obtain the dust
 Of the end precisely at the starting-point ?
 Why quaff life's cup blown free of all the beads,

The bright red froth wherein our beard should steep
 Before our mouth essay the black o' the wine? 1081
 Foolish, the love-fit? Let me prove it such
 Like you, before like you I puff things clear!
 "The best 's to come, no rapture but content!
 "Not the first glory but a sober glow, 1085
 "Nor a spontaneous outburst in pure boon,
 "So much as, gained by patience, care and toil!"
 Go preach that to your nephews, not to me
 Who, tired i' the midway of my life, would stop
 And take my first refreshment in a rose: 1090
 What 's this coarse woolly hip, worn smooth of leaf,
 You counsel I go plant in garden-pot,
 Water with tears, manure with sweat and blood,
 In confidence the seed shall germinate
 And, for its very best, some far-off day, 1095
 Grow big, and blow me out a dog-rose bell?
 Why must your nephews begin breathing spice
 O' the hundred-petalled Provence prodigy?
 Nay, more and worse,—would such my root bear rose—
 Prove really flower and favourite, not the kind 1100
 That 's queen, but those three leaves that make one cup
 And hold the hedge-bird's breakfast,—then indeed
 The prize though poor would pay the care and toil!

Respect we Nature that makes least as most,
 Marvellous in the minim ! But this bud, 1105
 Bit through and burned black by the tempter's tooth,
 This bloom whose best grace was the slug outside
 And the wasp inside its bosom,—call you "rose?"
 Claim no immunity from a weed's fate
 For the horrible present ! What you call my wife
 I call a nullity in female shape, 1111
 Vapid disgust, soon to be pungent plague,
 When mixed with, made confusion and a curse
 By two abominable nondescripts,
 That father and that mother : think you see 1115
 The dreadful bronze our boast, we Aretines,
 The Etruscan monster, the three-headed thing,
 Bellerophon's foe ! How name you the whole beast ?
 You choose to name the body from one head,
 That of the simple kid which droops the eye, 1120
 Hangs the neck and dies tenderly enough :
 I rather see the griesly lion belch
 Flame out i' the midst, the serpent writhe her rings,
 Grafted into the common stock for tail,
 And name the brute, Chimæra, which I slew ! 1125
 How was there ever more to be—(concede
 My wife's insipid harmless nullity)—

Dissociation from that pair of plagues—
That mother with her cunning and her cant—
The eyes with first their twinkle of conceit, 1130
Then, dropped to earth in mock-demureness,—now,
The smile self-satisfied from ear to ear,
Now, the prim pursed-up mouth's protruded lips,
With deferential duck, slow swing of head,
Tempting the sudden fist of man too much,— 1135
That owl-like screw of lid and rock of ruff!
As for the father,—Cardinal, you know,
The kind of idiot!—rife are such in Rome,
But they wear velvet commonly, such fools,
At the end of life, can furnish forth young folk 1140
Who grin and bear with imbecility,
Since the stalled ass, the joker, sheds from jaw
Corn, in the joke, for those who laugh or starve :
But what say we to the same solemn beast
Wagging his ears and wishful of our pat, 1145
When turned, with hide in holes and bones laid bare,
To forage for himself i' the waste o' the world,
Sir Dignity i' the dumps? Pat him? We drub
Self-knowledge, rather, into frowzy pate,
Teach Pietro to get trappings or go hang! 1150
Fancy this quondam oracle in vogue

At Via Vittoria, this personified
 Authority when time was,—Pantaloön
 Flaunting his tom-fool tawdry just the same
 As if Ash-Wednesday were mid-Carnival ! 1155
 That 's the extreme and unforgiveable
 Of sins, as I account such. Have you stooped
 For your own ends to bestialize yourself
 By flattery of a fellow of this stamp ?
 The ends obtained, or else shown out of reach, 1160
 He goes on, takes the flattery for pure truth,—
 “ You love and honour me, of course : what next ? ”
 What, but the trifle of the stabbing, friend ?—
 Which taught you how one worships when the shrine
 Has lost the relic that we bent before. 1165
 Angry ? And how could I be otherwise ?
 'T is plain : this pair of old pretentious fools
 Meant to fool me : it happens, I fooled them.
 Why could not these who sought to buy and sell
 Me,—when they found themselves were bought and sold,
 Make up their mind to the proved rule of right, 1171
 Be chattel and not chapman any more ?
 Miscalculation has its consequence ;
 But when the shepherd crooks a sheep-like thing
 And meaning to get wool, dislodges fleece 1175

And finds the veritable wolf beneath,
 (How that staunch image serves at every turn !)
 Does he, by way of being politic,
 Pluck the first whisker grimly visible?—
 Or rather grow in a trice all gratitude, 1180
 Protest this sort-of-what-one-might-name sheep
 Beats the old other curly-coated kind,
 And shall share board and bed, if so it deign,
 With its discoverer, like a royal ram ?
 Ay, thus, with chattering teeth and knocking knees,
 Would wisdom treat the adventure : these, forsooth,
 Tried whisker-plucking, and so found what trap 1187
 The whisker kept perdue, two rows of teeth—
 Sharp, as too late the prying fingers felt.
 What would you have ? The fools transgress, the fools
 Forthwith receive appropriate punishment : 1191
 They first insult me, I return the blow,
 There follows noise enough : four hubbub months,
 Now hue and cry, now whimpering and wail—
 A perfect goose-yard cackle of complaint 1195
 Because I do not gild the geese their oats,—
 I have enough of noise, ope wicket wide,
 Sweep out the couple to go whine elsewhere,
 Frightened a little, hurt in no respect,

And am just taking thought to breathe again, 1200
Taste the sweet sudden silence all about,
When, there they are at it, the old noise I know,
At Rome i' the distance! "What, begun once more?
"Whine on, wail ever, 't is the loser's right!"
But eh, what sort of voice grows on the wind? 1205
Triumph it sounds and no complaint at all!
And triumph it is! My boast was premature:
The creatures, I turned forth, clapped wing and crew
Fighting-cock-fashion,—they had filched a pearl
From dung-heap, and might boast with cause enough!
I was defrauded of all bargained for,— 1211
You know, the Pope knows, not a soul but knows
My dowry was derision, my gain—muck,
My wife, (the Church declared my flesh and blood)
The nameless bastard of a common whore: 1215
My old name turned henceforth to . . shall I say
"He that received the ordure in his face?"
And they who planned this wrong, performed this wrong,
And then revealed this wrong to the wide world,
Rounded myself in the ears with my own wrong,— 1220
Why, these were . . note hell's lucky malice, now! . .
These were just they, and they alone, could act
And publish in this wise their infamy,

Secure that men would in a breath believe
 Compassionate and pardon them,—for why? 1225
 They plainly were too stupid to invent,
 Too simple to distinguish wrong from right,—
 Inconscious agents they, the silly-sooth,
 Of heaven's retributive justice on the strong
 Proud cunning violent oppressor—me! 1230
 Follow them to their fate and help your best,
 You Rome, Arezzo, foes called friends of mine,
 They gave the good long laugh to at my cost!
 Defray your share o' the cost since you partook
 The entertainment! Do!—assured the while, 1235
 That not one stab, I dealt to right and left,
 But went the deeper for a fancy—this—
 That each might do me two-fold service, find
 A friend's face at the bottom of each wound,
 And scratch its smirk a little! 1240

Panciatichi!

There's a report at Florence,—is it true?—
 That when your relative the Cardinal
 Built, only the other day, that barrack-bulk,
 The palace in Via Larga, someone picked 1245
 From out the street a saucy quip enough
 That fell there from its day's flight through the town,

About the flat front and the windows wide
 And ugly heap of cornice,—hitched the joke
 Into a sonnet, signed his name thereto, 1250
 And forthwith pinned on post the pleasantry.
 For which he 's at the galleys, rowing now
 Up to his waist in water,—just because
Panciatic and *lymphatic* rhymed so pat :
 I hope, Sir, those who passed this joke on me 1255
 Were not unduly punished? What say you,
 Prince of the Church, my patron? Nay, indeed !
 I shall not dare insult your wits so much
 As think this problem difficult to solve !
 This Pietro and Violante, then, I say, 1260
 These two ambiguous insects, changing name
 And nature with the season's warmth or chill,—
 Now, grovelled, grubbing toiling moiling ants,
 A very synonym of thrift and peace,—
 Anon, with lusty June to prick their heart, 1265
 Soared i' the air, winged flies for more offence,
 Circled me, buzzed me deaf and stung me blind,
 And stunk me dead with fetor in the face
 Until I stopped the nuisance : there 's my crime !
 Pity I did not suffer them subside 1270
 Into some further shape and final form

Of execrable life? My masters, no !

I, by one blow, wisely cut short at once

Them and their transformations of disgust

In the snug little Villa out of hand.

1275

“ Grant me confession, give bare time for that ! ”—

Shouted the sinner till his mouth was stopped.

His life confessed !—that was enough for me,

Who came to see that he did penance. 'S death !

Here 's a coil raised, a pother and for what?

1280

Because strength, being provoked by weakness, fought

And conquered,—the world never heard the like !

Pah, how I spend my breath on them, as if

'T was their fate troubled me, too hard to range

Among the right and fit and proper things !

1285

Ay, but Pompilia,—I await your word,—

She, unimpeached of crime, unimplicate

In folly, one of alien blood to these

I punish, why extend my claim, exact

Her portion of the penalty? Yes, friends,

1290

I go too fast : the orator 's at fault :

Yes, ere I lay her, with your leave, by them

As she was laid at San Lorenzo late,

I ought to step back, lead her by degrees,

Recounting at each step some fresh offence, 1295
 Up to the red bed,—never fear, I will!
 Gaze at her, where you place her, to begin,
 Confound me with her gentleness and worth!
 The horrible pair have fled and left her now,
 She has her husband for her sole concern, 1300
 His wife, the woman fashioned for his help,
 Flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone, the bride
 To groom as is the Church and Spouse, to Christ:
 There she stands in his presence,—“Thy desire
 “Shall be to the husband, o’er thee shall he rule!”
 —“Pompilia, who declare that you love God, 1306
 “You know who said that: then, desire my love,
 “Yield me contentment and be ruled aright!”
 She sits up, she lies down, she comes and goes,
 Kneels at the couch-side, overleans the sill 1310
 O’ the window, cold and pale and mute as stone,
 Strong as stone also. “Well, are they not fled?
 “Am I not left, am I not one for all?
 “Speak a word, drop a tear, detach a glance,
 “Bless me or curse me of your own accord! 1315
 “Is it the ceiling only wants your soul,
 “Is worth your eyes?” And then the eyes descend
 And do look at me. Is it at the meal?

"Speak!" she obeys, "Be silent!" she obeys,
 Counting the minutes till I cry "Depart," 1320
 As brood-bird when you saunter past her eggs.
 Departed, just the same through door and wall
 I see the same stone strength of white despair.
 And all this will be never otherwise!
 Before, the parents' presence lent her life: 1325
 She could play off her sex's armoury,
 Intreat, reproach, be female to my male,
 Try all the shrieking doubles of the hare,
 Go clamour to the Commissary, bid
 The Archbishop hold my hands and stop my tongue,
 And yield fair sport so: but the tactics change, 1331
 The hare stands stock-still to enrage the hound!
 Since that day when she learned she was no child,
 Of those she thought her parents,—that their trick
 Had tricked me whom she thought sole trickster late,—
 Why, I suppose she said within herself 1336
 "Then, no more struggle for my parents' sake,
 "And, for my own sake, why needs struggle be?"
 But is there no third party to the pact?
 What of her husband's relish or dislike 1340
 For this new game of giving up the game,
 This worst offence of not offending more?

I'll not believe but instinct wrought in this,
 Set her on to conceive and execute
 The preferable plague . . . how sure they probe,—
 These jades, the sensitivest soft of man ! 1346
 The long black hair was wound now in a wisp,—
 Crowned sorrow better than the wild web late :
 No more soiled dress, 'tis trimness triumphs now,
 For how should malice go with negligence ? 1350
 The frayed silk looked the fresher for her spite !
 There was an end to springing out of bed,
 Praying me, with face buried on my feet,
 Be hindered of my pastime,—so an end
 To my rejoinder, “ What, on the ground at last ? 1355
 “ Vanquished in fight, a supplicant for life ?
 “ What if I raise you ? 'Ware the casting down
 “ When next you fight me ! ” Then, she lay there, mine :
 Now, mine she is if I please wring her neck,—
 A moment of disquiet, working eyes, 1360
 Protruding tongue, a long sigh, then no more—
 As if one killed the horse one could not ride !
 Had I enjoined “ Cut off the hair ! ”—why, snap
 The scissors, and at once a yard or so
 Had fluttered in black serpents to the floor : 1365
 But till I did enjoin it, how she combs,

Uncurls and draws out to the complete length,
 Plaits, places the insulting rope on head
 To be an eyesore past dishevelment !
 Is all done ? Then sit still again and stare ! 1370
 I advise—no one think to bear that look
 Of steady wrong, endured as steadily,
 —Through what sustainment of deluding hope ?
 Who is the friend i' the background that notes all ?
 Who may come presently and close accounts ? 1375
 This self-possession to the uttermost,
 How does it differ in aught, save degree,
 From the terrible patience of God ?
 “ All which just means,
 “ She did not love you ! ” Again the word is launched
 And the fact fronts me ! What, you try the wards 1381
 With the true key and the dead lock flies ope ?
 No, it sticks fast and leaves you fumbling still !
 You have some fifty servants, Cardinal,—
 Which of them loves you ? Which subordinate 1385
 But makes parade of such officiousness
 That,—if there 's no love prompts it,—love, the sham,
 Does twice the service done by love, the true.
 God bless us liars, where 's one touch of truth
 In what we tell the world, or world tells us, 1390

Of how we like each other? All the same,
 We calculate on word and deed, nor err,—
 Bid such a man do such a loving act,
 Sure of effect and negligent of cause,
 Just as we bid a horse, with cluck of tongue, 1395
 Stretch his legs arch-wise, crouch his saddled back
 To foot-reach of the stirrup—all for love,
 And some for memory of the smart of switch
 On the inside of the foreleg—what care we?
 Yet where 's the bond obliges horse to man 1400
 Like that which binds fast wife to husband? God
 Laid down the law: gave man the brawny arm
 And ball of fist—woman the beardless cheek
 And proper place to suffer in the side:
 Since it is he can strike, let her obey! 1405
 Can she feel no love? Let her show the more,
 Sham the worse, damn herself praiseworthy!
 Who 's that soprano Rome went mad about
 Last week while I lay rotting in my straw?
 The very jailor gossiped in his praise— 1410
 How,—dressed up like Armida, though a man;
 And painted to look pretty, though a fright,—
 He still made love so that the ladies swooned,
 Being an eunuch. “ Ah, Rinaldo mine !

" But to breathe by thee while Jove slays us both ! "

All the poor bloodless creature never felt, 1416
 Si, do, re, mi, fa, squeak and squall—for what ?
 Two gold zecchines the evening ! Here 's my slave,
 Whose body and soul depend upon my nod,
 Can't falter out the first note in the scale 1420
 For her life ! Why blame me if I take the life ?
 All women cannot give men love, forsooth !
 No, nor all pullets lay the henwife eggs—
 Whereat she bids them remedy the fault,
 Brood on a chalk-ball : soon the nest is stocked— 1425
 Otherwise, to the plucking and the spit !
 This wife of mine was of another mood—
 Would not begin the lie that ends with truth,
 Nor feign the love that brings real love about :
 Wherefore I judged, sentenced and punished her. 1430
 But why particularize, defend the deed ?
 Say that I hated her for no one cause
 Beyond my pleasure so to do,—what then ?
 Just on as much incitement acts the world,
 All of you ! Look and like ! You favour one, 1435
 Brow-beat another, leave alone a third,—
 Why should you master natural caprice ?
 Pure nature ! Try—plant elm by ash in file ;

Both unexceptionable trees enough,
 They ought to overlean each other, pair 1440
 At top and arch across the avenue
 The whole path to the pleasaunce: do they so—
 Or loathe, lie off abhorrent each from each?
 Lay the fault elsewhere, since we must have faults:
 Mine shall have been,—seeing there 's ill in the end
 Come of my course,—that I fare somehow worse 1446
 For the way I took,—my fault as God 's my judge
 I see not where the fault lies, that 's the truth!
 I ought . . oh, ought in my own interest
 Have let the whole adventure go untried, 1450
 This chance by marriage,—or else, trying it,
 Ought to have turned it to account some one
 O' the hundred otherwises? Ay, my friend,
 Easy to say, easy to do,—step right
 Now you 've stepped left and stumbled on the thing,
 —The red thing! Doubt I any more than you 1456
 That practice makes man perfect? Give again
 The chance,—same marriage and no other wife,
 Be sure I'll edify you! That 's because
 I 'm practised, grown fit guide for Guido's self. 1460
 You proffered guidance,—I know, none so well,—
 You laid down law and rolled decorum out,

From pulpit-corner on the gospel-side,—
 Wanted to make your great experience mine,
 Save me the personal search and pains so : thanks !
 Take your word on life's use? When I take his— 1466
 The muzzled ox that treadeth out the corn,
 Gone blind in padding round and round one path,—
 As to the taste of green grass in the field !
 What do you know o' the world that 's trodden flat
 And salted sterile with your daily dung, 1471
 Leavened into a lump of loathsomeness ?
 Take your opinion of the modes of life,
 The aims of life, life's triumph or defeat,
 How to feel, how to scheme and how to do 1475
 Or else leave undone? You preached long and loud
 On high-days, " Take our doctrine upon trust !
 " Into the mill-house with you ! Grind our corn,
 " Relish our chaff, and let the green grass grow !"
 I tried chaff, found I famished on such fare, 1480
 So made this mad rush at the mill-house-door,
 Buried my head up to the ears in dew,
 Browzed on the best, for which you brain me, Sirs !
 Be it so ! I conceived of life that way,
 And still declare—life, without absolute use 1485
 Of the actual sweet therein, is death, not life.

Give me,—pay down,—not promise, which is air,—
 Something that 's out of life and better still,
 Make sure reward, make certain punishment,
 Entice me, scare me,—I 'll forego this life ; 1490
 Otherwise, no !—the less that words, mere wind,
 Would cheat me of some minutes while they plague.
 The fulness of revenge here,—blame yourselves
 For this eruption of the pent-up soul
 You prisoned first and played with afterward ! 1495
 “ Deny myself ” meant simply pleasure you,
 The sacred and superior, save the mark !
 You,—whose stupidity and insolence
 I must defer to, soothe at every turn,—
 Whose swine-like snuffling greed and grunting lust
 I had to wink at or help gratify,— 1501
 While the same passions,—dared they perk in me,
 Me, the immeasurably marked, by God,
 Master of the whole world of such as you,—
 I, boast such passions? 'T was “ Suppress them straight !
 “ Or stay, we 'll pick and choose before destroy : 1506
 “ Here 's wrath in you,—a serviceable sword,—
 “ Beat it into a ploughshare ! What 's this long
 “ Lance-like ambition? Forge a pruning-hook,
 “ May be of service when our vines grow tall ! 1510

“ But—sword used swordwise, spear thrust out as spear?

“ Anathema ! Suppression is the word ! ”

My nature, when the outrage was too gross,

Widened itself an outlet over-wide

By way of answer?—sought its own relief 1515

With more of fire and brimstone than you wished?

All your own doing : preachers, blame yourselves !

'Tis I preach while the hourglass runs and runs !

God keep me patient ! All I say just means—

My wife proved, whether by her fault or mine,— 1520

That 's immaterial,—a true stumbling-block

I' the way of me her husband : I but plied

The hatchet yourselves use to clear a path,

Was politic, played the game you warrant wins,

Plucked at law's robe a-rustle through the courts, 1525

Bowed down to kiss divinity's buckled shoe

Cushioned i' the church : efforts all wide the aim !

Procedures to no purpose ! Then flashed truth !

The letter kills, the spirit keeps alive

In law and gospel : there be nods and winks 1530

Instruct a wise man to assist himself

In certain matters nor seek aid at all.

“ Ask money of me, ”—quoth the clownish saw,—

" And take my purse ! But,—speaking with respect,—
 " Need you a solace for the troubled nose ? 1535
 " Let everybody wipe his own himself !"
 Sirs, tell me free and fair ! Had things gone well
 At the wayside inn : had I surprised asleep
 The runaways, as was so probable,
 And pinned them each to other partridge-wise, 1540
 Through back and breast to breast and back, then bade
 Bystanders witness if the spit, my sword,
 Weré loaded with unlawful game for once—
 Would you have interposed to damp the glow
 Applauding me on every husband's cheek ? 1545
 Would you have checked the cry " A judgment, see !
 " A warning, note ! Be henceforth chaste, ye wives,
 " Nor stray beyond your proper precinct, priests !"
 If you had, then your house against itself
 Divides, nor stands your kingdom any more. 1550
 Oh, why, why was it not ordained just so ?
 Why fell not things out so nor otherwise ?
 Ask that particular devil whose task it is
 To trip the all-but-at perfection,—slur
 The line o' the painter just where paint leaves off 1555
 And life begins,—puts ice into the ode
 O' the poet while he cries " Next stanza—fire !"

Inscribes all human effort with one word,
 Artistry's haunting curse, the Incomplete !
 Being incomplete, the act escaped success. 1560
 Easy to blame now ! Every fool can swear
 To hole in net that held and slipped the fish.
 But, treat my act with fair unjaundiced eye,
 What was there wanting to a masterpiece
 Except the luck that lies beyond a man ? 1565
 My way with the woman, now proved grossly wrong,
 Just missed of being gravely grandly right
 And making critics laugh o' the other side.
 Do, for the poor obstructed artist's sake,
 Go with him over that spoiled work once more ! 1570
 Take only its first flower, the ended act
 Now in the dusty pod, dry and defunct !
 I march to the Villa, and my men with me,
 That evening, and we reach the door and stand.
 I say . . no, it shoots through me lightning-like 1575
 While I pause, breathe, my hand upon the latch,
 " Let me forebode ! Thus far, too much success :
 " I want the natural failure—find it where ?
 " Which thread will have to break and leave a loop
 " I' the meshy combination, my brain's loom 1580
 " Wove this long while and now next minute tests ?

" Of three that are to catch, two should go free,
 " One must : all three surprised,—impossible !
 " Beside, I seek three and may chance on six,—
 " This neighbour, t' other gossip,—the babe's birth 1585
 " Brings such to fireside and folks give them wine,—
 " 'T is late : but when I break in presently
 " One will be found outlingering the rest
 " For promise of a posset,—one whose shout
 " Would raise the dead down in the catacombs, 1590
 " Much more the city-watch that goes its round.
 " When did I ever turn adroitly up
 " To sun some brick embedded in the soil,
 " And with one blow crush all three scorpions there ?
 " Or Pietro or Violante shambles off— 1595
 " It cannot be but I surprise my wife—
 " If only she is stopped and stamped on, good !
 " That shall suffice : more is improbable.
 " Now I may knock ! " And this once for my sake
 The impossible was effected : I called king, 1600
 Queen and knave in a sequence, and cards came,
 All three, three only ! So, I had my way,
 Did my deed : so, unbrokenly lay bare
 Each tænia that had sucked me dry of juice,
 At last outside me, not an inch of ring 1605

Left now to writhe about and root itself

I' the heart all powerless for revenge! Henceforth

I might thrive: these were drawn and dead and damned.

Oh Cardinal, the deep long sigh you heave

When the load 's off you, ringing as it runs 1610

All the way down the serpent-stair to hell!

No doubt the fine delirium flustered me,

Turned my brain with the influx of success

As if the sole need now were to wave wand

And find doors fly wide,—wish and have my will,—

The rest o' the scheme would care for itself: escape?

Easy enough were that, and poor beside! 1617

It all but proved so,—ought to quite have proved,

Since, half the chances had sufficed, set free

Anyone, with his senses at command, 1620

From thrice the danger of my flight. But, drunk,

Redundantly triumphant,—some reverse

Was sure to follow! There 's no other way

Accounts for such prompt perfect failure then

And there on the instant. Any day o' the week, 1625

A ducat slid discreetly into palm

O' the mute post-master, while you whisper him—

How you the Count and certain four your knaves,

Have just been mauling who was malapert,

Suspect the kindred may prove troublesome, 1630
 Therefore, want horses in a hurry,—that
 And nothing more secures you any day
 The pick o' the stable ! Yet I try the trick,
 Double the bribe, call myself Duke for Count,
 And say the dead man only was a Jew, 1635
 And for my pains find I am dealing just
 With the one scrupulous fellow in all Rome—
 Just this immaculate official stares,
 Sees I want hat on head and sword in sheath,
 Am splashed with other sort of wet than wine, 1640
 Shrugs shoulder, puts my hand by, gold and all,
 Stands on the strictness of the rule o' the road !
 “ Where's the Permission ? ” Where's the wretched rag
 With the due seal and sign of Rome's Police,
 To be had for asking, half-an-hour ago ? 1645
 “ Gone ? Get another, or no horses hence ! ”
 He dares not stop me, we five glare too grim,
 But hinders,—hacks and hamstrings sure enough,
 Gives me some twenty miles of miry road
 More to march in the middle of that night 1650
 Whereof the rough beginning taxed the strength
 O' the youngsters, much more mine, such as you see,
 Who had to think as well as act : dead-beat,

We gave in ere we reached the boundary
And safe spot out of this irrational Rome,— 1655
Where, on dismounting from our steeds next day,
We had snapped our fingers at you, safe and sound,
Tuscans once more in blessed Tuscany,
Where the laws make allowance, understand
Civilized life and do its champions right ! 1660
Witness the sentence of the Rota there,
Arezzo uttered, the Granduke confirmed,
One week before I acted on its hint,—
Giving friend Guillichini, for his love,
The galleys, and my wife your saint, Rome's saint,—
Rome manufactures saints enough to know,— 1666
Seclusion at the Stinche for her life.
All this, that all but was, might all have been,
Yet was not ! baulked by just a scrupulous knave
Whose palm was horn through handling horses' hoofs
And could not close upon my proffered gold ! 1671
What say you to the spite of fortune ? Well,
The worst's in store : thus hindered, haled this way
To Rome again by hangdogs, whom find I
Here, still to fight with, but my pale frail wife ? 1675
—Riddled with wounds by one not like to waste
The blows he dealt,—knowing anatomy,—

(I think I told you) one to pick and choose
The vital parts! 'T was learning all in vain!
She too must shimmer through the gloom o' the grave,
Come and confront me—not at judgment-seat 1681
Where I could twist her soul, as erst her flesh,
And turn her truth into a lie,—but there,
O' the death-bed, with God's hand between us both,
Striking me dumb, and helping her to speak, 1685
Tell her own story her own way, and turn
My plausibility to nothingness!
Four whole days did Pompilia keep alive,
With the best surgery of Rome agape
At the miracle,—this cut, the other slash, 1690
And yet the life refusing to dislodge,
Four whole extravagant impossible days,
Till she had time to finish and persuade
Every man, every woman, every child
In Rome of what she would : the selfsame she 1695
Who, but a year ago, had wrung her hands,
Reddened her eyes and beat her breasts, rehearsed
The whole game at Arezzo, nor availed
Thereby to move one heart or raise one hand!
When destiny intends you cards like these, 1700
What good of skill and preconcerted play?

Had she been found dead, as I left her dead,
 I should have told a tale brooked no reply :
 You scarcely will suppose me found at fault
 With that advantage ! “ What brings me to Rome ?
 “ Necessity to claim and take my wife : 1706
 “ Better, to claim and take my new-born babe,—
 “ Strong in paternity a fortnight old,
 “ When ’t is at strongest : warily I work,
 “ Knowing the machinations of my foe ; 1710
 “ I have companionship and use the night :
 “ I seek my wife and child,—I find—no child
 “ But wife, in the embraces of that priest
 “ Who caused her to elope from me. These two,
 “ Backed by the pander-pair who watch the while, 1715
 “ Spring on me like so many tiger-cats,
 “ Glad of the chance to end the intruder. I—
 “ What should I do but stand on my defence,
 “ Strike right, strike left, strike thick and threefold, slay,
 “ Not all—because the coward priest escapes. 1720
 “ Last, I escape, in fear of evil tongues,
 “ And having had my taste of Roman law.”
 What’s disputable, refutable here?—
 Save by just this one ghost-thing half on earth,
 Half out of it,—as if she held God’s hand 1725

While she leant back and looked her last at me,
 Forgiving me (here monks begin to weep)
 Oh, from her very soul, commending mine
 To heavenly mercies which are infinite,—
 While fixing fast my head beneath your knife ! 1730
 'T is fate not fortune ! All is of a piece !
 What was it you informed me of my youths ?
 My rustic four o' the family, soft swains,
 What sweet surprise had they in store for me,
 Those of my very household,—what did Law 1735
 Twist with her rack-and-cord-contrivance late
 From out their bones and marrow ? What but this—
 Had no one of these several stumbling-blocks
 Stopped me, they yet were cherishing a scheme,
 All of their honest country homespun wit, 1740
 To quietly next day at crow of cock,
 Cut my own throat too, for their own behoof,
 Seeing I had forgot to clear accounts
 O' the instant, nowise slackened speed for that,—
 And somehow never might find memory, 1745
 Once safe back in Arezzo, where things change,
 And a court-lord needs mind no country lout.
 Well, being the arch-offender, I die last,—
 May, ere my head falls, have my eyesight free,

Nor miss them dangling high on either hand, 1750
 Like scarecrows in a hemp-field, for their pains !

And then my Trial,—'t is my Trial that bites
 Like a corrosive, so the cards are packed,
 Dice loaded, and my life-stake tricked away !
 Look at my lawyers, lacked they grace of law, 1755
 Latin or logic ? Were not they fools to the height,
 Fools to the depth, fools to the level between,
 O' the foolishness set to decide the case ?
 They feign, they flatter ; nowise does it skill,
 Everything goes against me : deal each judge 1760
 His dole of flattery and feigning,—why,
 He turns and tries and snuffs and savours it,
 As an old fly the sugar-grain, your gift ;
 Then eyes your thumb and finger, brushes clean
 The absurd old head of him, and whisks away, 1765
 Leaving your thumb and finger dirty. Faugh !

And finally, after this long-drawn range
 Of affront, failure, failure and affront,—
 This path, twixt crosses leading to a skull,
 Paced by me barefoot, bloodied by my palms 1770
 From the entry to the end,—there 's light at length,

A cranny of escape,—appeal may be
 To the old man, to the father, to the Pope,
 For a little life—from one whose life is spent,
 A little pity—from pity's source and seat, 1775
 A little indulgence to rank, privilege,
 From one who is the thing personified,
 Rank, privilege, indulgence, grown beyond
 Earth's bearing, even, ask Jansenius else !
 Still the same answer, still no other tune 1780
 From the cicala perched at the tree-top
 Than crickets noisy round the root,—'t is " Die !"
 Bids Law—" Be damned !" adds Gospel,—nay,
 No word so frank,—'t is rather, " Save yourself !"
 The Pope subjoins—" Confess and be absolved ! 1785
 " So shall my credit countervail your shame,
 " And the world see I have not lost the knack
 " Of trying all the spirits,—yours, my son,
 " Wants but a fiery washing to emerge
 " In clarity ! Come, cleanse you, ease the ache 1790
 " Of these old bones, refresh our bowels, boy !"
 Do I mistake your mission from the Pope ?
 Then, bear his Holiness the mind of me !
 I do get strength from being thrust to wall,
 Successively wrenched from pillar and from post 1795

By this tenacious hate of fortune, hate
Of all things in, under, and above earth.
Warfare, begun this mean unmanly mode,
Does best to end so,—gives earth spectacle
Of a brave fighter who succumbs to odds 1800
That turn defeat to victory. Stab, I fold
My mantle round me! Rome approves my act :
Applauds the blow which costs me life but keeps
My honour spotless : Rome would praise no more
Had I fallen, say, some fifteen years ago, 1805
Helping Vienna when our Aretines
Flocked to Duke Charles and fought Turk Mustafa ;
Nor would you two be trembling o'er my corpse
With all this exquisite solicitude.
Why is it that I make such suit to live ? 1810
The popular sympathy that 's round me now
Would break like bubble that o'er-domes a fly—
Pretty enough while he lies quiet there,
But let him want the air and ply the wing,
Why, it breaks and bespatters him, what else ? 1815
Cardinal, if the Pope had pardoned me,
And I walked out of prison through the crowd,
It would not be your arm I should dare press !
Then, if I got safe to my place again,

How sad and sapless were the years to come ! 1820
 I go my old ways and find things grown grey ;
 You priests leer at me, old friends look askance ;
 The mob's in love, I'll wager, to a man,
 With my poor young good beauteous murdered wife :
 For hearts require instruction how to beat, 1825
 And eyes, on warrant of the story, Wax
 Wanton at portraiture in white and black
 Of dead Pompilia gracing ballad-sheet,
 Which, had she died unmurdered and unsung,
 Would never turn though she paced street as bare 1830
 As the mad penitent ladies do in France.
 My brothers quietly would edge me out
 Of use and management of things called mine ;
 Do I command ? " You stretched command before !"
 Show anger ? " Anger little helped you once !" 1835
 Advise ? " How managed you affairs of old ?"
 My very mother, all the while they gird,
 Turns eye up, gives confirmatory groan,—
 For unsuccess, explain it how you will,
 Disqualifies you, makes you doubt yourself, 1840
 —Much more, is found decisive by your friends.
 Beside, am I not fifty years of age ?
 What new leap would a life take, checked like mine

I' the spring at outset? Where's my second chance?
 Ay, but the babe . . I had forgot my son, 1845
 My heir! Now for a burst of gratitude!
 There's some appropriate service to intone,
 Some *gaudeamus* and thanksgiving-psalm!
 Old, I renew my youth in him, and poor
 Possess a treasure,—is not that the phrase? 1850
 Only I must wait patient twenty years—
 Nourishing all the while, as father ought,
 The excrescence with my daily blood of life.
 Does it respond to hope, such sacrifice,—
 Grows the wen plump while I myself grow lean? 1855
 Why, here's my son and heir in evidence,
 Who stronger, wiser, handsomer than I
 By fifty years, relieves me of each load,—
 Tames my hot horse, carries my heavy gun,
 Courts my coy mistress,—has his apt advice 1860
 On house-economy, expenditure,
 And what not? All which good gifts and great growth
 Because of my decline, he brings to bear
 On Guido, but half apprehensive how
 He cumpers earth, crosses the brisk young Count, 1865
 Who civilly would thrust him from the scene.
 Contrariwise, does the blood-offering fail?

There 's an ineptitude, one blank the more
 Added to earth in semblance of my child?
 Then, this has been a costly piece of work, 1870
 My life exchanged for his!—why he, not I,
 Enjoy the world, if no more grace accrue?
 Dwarf me, what giant have you made of him?
 I do not dread the disobedient son—
 I know how to suppress rebellion there, 1875
 Being not quite the fool my father was.
 But grant the medium measure of a man,
 The usual compromise 'twixt fool and sage,
 —You know—the tolerably-obstinate,
 The not-so-much-perverse but you may train, 1880
 The true son-servant that, when parent bids
 “Go work, son, in my vineyard!” makes reply
 “I go, Sir!”—Why, what profit in your son
 Beyond the drudges you might subsidize,
 Have the same work from at a paul the head? 1885
 Look at those four young precious olive-plants
 Reared at Vittiano,—not on flesh and blood,
 These twenty years, but black bread and sour wine!
 I bade them put forth tender branch, and hook
 And hurt three enemies I had in Rome : 1890
 They did my hest as unreluctantly,

At promise of a dollar, as a son
 Adjured by mumping memories of the past !
 No, nothing repays youth expended so—
 Youth, I say, who am young still,—give but leave 1895
 To live my life out, to the last I 'd live
 And die conceding age no right of youth !
 It is the will runs the renewing nerve
 Through flaccid flesh, would faint before the time.
 Therefore no sort of use for son have I— 1900
 Sick, not of life's feast but of steps to climb
 To the house where life prepares her feast,—of means
 To the end : for make the end attainable
 Without the means,—my relish were like yours.
 A man may have an appetite enough 1905
 For a whole dish of robins ready cooked,
 And yet lack courage to face sleet, pad snow,
 And snare sufficiency for supper.

Thus

The time's arrived when, ancient Roman-like, 1910
 I am bound to fall on my own sword,—why not
 Say—Tuscan-like, more ancient, better still ?
 Will you hear truth can do no harm nor good ?
 I think I never was at any time

A Christian, as you nickname all the world, 1915
 Me among others : truce to nonsense now !
 Name me, a primitive religionist—
 As should the aboriginal be
 I boast myself, Etruscan, Aretine,
 One sprung,—your frigid Virgil's fieriest word,— 1920
 From fauns and nymphs, trunks and the heart of oak,
 With,—for a visible divinity,—
 The portent of a Jove Ægiochus
 Descried 'mid clouds, lightning and thunder, couched
 On topmost crag of your Capitoline— 1925
 'Tis in the Seventh Æneid,—what, the Eighth ?
 Right,—thanks, Abate,—though the Christian's dumb,
 The Latinist's vivacious in you yet !
 I know my grandsire had our tapestry
 Marked with the motto, 'neath a certain shield 1930
 His grandson presently will give some gules
 To vary azure. First we fight for faiths,
 But get to shake hands at the last of all :
 Mine's your faith too,—in Jove Ægiochus !
 Nor do Greek gods, that serve as supplement, 1935
 Jar with the simpler scheme, if understood.
 We want such intermediary race
 To make communication possible ;

The real thing were too lofty, we too low,
 Midway hang these : we feel their use so plain 1940
 In linking height to depth, that we doff hat
 And put no question nor pry narrowly
 Into the nature hid behind the names.
 We grudge no rite the fancy may demand ;
 But never, more than needs, invent, refine, 1945
 Improve upon requirement, idly wise
 Beyond the letter, teaching gods their trade,
 Which is to teach us : we 'll obey when taught.
 Why should we do our duty past the due ?
 When the sky darkens, Jove is wroth,—say prayer ! 1950
 When the sun shines and Jove is glad,—sing psalm !
 But wherefore pass prescription and devise
 Blood-offering for sweat-service, lend the rod
 A pungency through pickle of our own ?
 Learned Abate,—no one teaches you 1955
 What Venus means and who 's Apollo here !
 I spare you, Cardinal,—but, though you wince,
 You know me, I know you, and both know that !
 So, if Apollo bids us fast, we fast :
 But where does Venus order we stop sense 1960
 When Master Pietro rhymes a pleasantry ?
 Give alms prescribed on Friday,—but, hold hand

Because your foe lies prostrate,—where 's the word
Explicit in the book debars revenge ?

The rationale of your scheme is just 1965

“ Pay toll here, there pursue your pleasure free ! ”

So do you turn to use the medium-powers,
Mars and Minerva, Bacchus and the rest,
And so are saved propitiating—what ?

What all good, all wise and all potent Jove 1970

Vexed by the very sins in man, himself
Made life's necessity when man he made ?

Irrational bunglers ! So, the living truth
Revealed to strike Pan dead, ducks low at last,

Prays leave to hold its own and live good days 1975

Provided it go masque grotesquely, called
Christian not Pagan ? Oh, you purged the sky
Of all gods save the One, the great and good,
Clapped hands and triumphed ! But the change came

fast :

The inexorable need in man for life— 1980

Life,—you may mulct and minish to a grain
Out of the lump, so the grain left but live,—
Laughed at your substituting death for life,
And bade you do your worst,—which worst was done

—Pass that age styled the primitive and pure 1985

When Saint this, Saint that, dutifully starved,
 Froze, fought with beasts, was beaten and abused
 And finally ridded of his flesh by fire,
 Keeping the while unspotted from the world!—
 Good : but next age, how goes the game, who gives
 His life and emulates Saint that and this? 1991
 They mutiny, mutter who knows what excuse?
 In fine make up their minds to leave the new,
 Stick to the old,—enjoy old liberty,
 No prejudice, all the same, if so it please, 1995
 To the new profession : sin o' the sly, henceforth !
 Let the law stand : the letter kills, what then ?
 The spirit saves as unmistakeably.
 Omniscience sees, Omnipotence could stop,
 All-mercifulness pardons,—it must be, 2000
 Frown law its fiercest, there 's a wink somewhere.

Such was the logic in this head of mine :
 I, like the rest, wrote "poison" on my bread ;
 But broke and ate :—said "those that use the sword
 "Shall perish by the same ;" then stabbed my foe. 2005
 I stand on solid earth, not empty air :
 Dislodge me, let your Pope's crook hale me hence !
 Not he, nor you ! And I so pity both,

I 'll make the speech you want the wit to make :

“ Count Guido, who reveal our mystery, 2010

“ You trace all issues to the love of life :

“ We have a life to love and guard, like you.

“ Why did you put us upon self-defence ?

“ You well knew what prompt pass-word would appease

“ The sentry's ire when folk infringe his bounds, 2015

“ And yet kept mouth shut : do you wonder then

“ If, in mere decency, he shot you dead ?

“ He can't have people play such pranks as you

“ Beneath his nose at noonday, who disdain

“ To give him an excuse before the world, 2020

“ By crying ‘ I break rule to save our camp ! ’

“ Under the old rule, such offence were death ;

“ And so had you heard Pontifex pronounce

“ ‘ Since you slay foe and violate the form,

“ ‘ That turns to murder, which were sacrifice 2025

“ ‘ Had you, while, say, law-suiting him to death,

“ ‘ But raised an altar to the Unknown God,

“ ‘ Or else the Genius of the Vatican.’

“ Why then this pother ?—all because the Pope

“ Doing his duty, cries ‘ A foreigner, 2030

“ ‘ You scandalize the natives : here at Rome

“ ‘ *Romano vivitur more* : wise men, here,

“ ‘ Put the Church forward and efface themselves.
 “ ‘ The fit defence had been,—you stamped on wheat,
 “ ‘ Intending all the time to trample tares,— 2035
 “ ‘ Were fain extirpate, then, the heretic,
 “ ‘ And now find, in your haste you slew a fool :
 “ ‘ Nor Pietro, nor Violante, nor your wife
 “ ‘ Meant to breed up your babe a Molinist !
 “ ‘ Whence you are duly contrite. Not one word 2040
 “ ‘ Of all this wisdom did you urge !—which slip
 “ ‘ Death must atone for ! ’ ”

So, let death atone !

So ends mistake, so end mistakers !—end
 Perhaps to recommence,—how should I know ? 2045
 Only, be sure, no punishment, no pain
 Childish, preposterous, impossible,
 But some such fate as Ovid could foresee,—
Byblis in fluvium, let the weak soul end
 In water, *sed Lycaon in lupum*, but 2050
 The strong become a wolf for evermore !
 Change that Pompilia to a puny stream
 Fit to reflect the daisies on its bank !
 Let me turn wolf, be whole, and sate, for once,—
 Wallow in what is now a wolfishness 2055
 Coerced too much by the humanity

That 's half of me as well ! Grow out of man,
 Glut the wolf-nature,—what remains but grow
 Into the man again, be man indeed
 And all man ? Do I ring the changes right? 2060
 Deformed, transformed, reformed, informed, conformed !
 The honest instinct, pent and crossed through life,
 Let surge by death into a visible flow
 Of rapture : as the strangled thread of flame
 Painfully winds, annoying and annoyed, 2065
 Malignant and maligned, thro' stone and ore,
 Till earth exclude the stranger : vented once,
 It finds full play, is recognized a-top
 Some mountain as no such abnormal birth.
 Fire for the mount, the streamlet for the vale ! 2070
 Ay, of the water was that wife of mine—
 Be it for good, be it for ill, no run
 O' the red thread through that insignificance !
 Again, how she is at me with those eyes !
 Away with the empty stare ! Be holy still, 2075
 And stupid ever ! Occupy your patch
 Of private snow that 's somewhere in what world
 May now be growing icy round your head,
 And aguish at your foot-print,—freeze not me,
 Dare follow not another step I take. 2080

Not with so much as those detested eyes,
 No, though they follow but to pray me pause
 On the incline, earth's edge that 's next to hell !
 None of your abnegation of revenge !
 Fly at me frank, tug while I tear again ! 2085
 There 's God, go tell Him, testify your worst !
 Not she ! There was no touch in her of hate :
 And it would prove her hell, if I reached mine !
 To know I suffered, would still sadden her,
 Do what the angels might to make amends ! 2090
 Therefore there 's either no such place as hell,
 Or thence shall I be thrust forth, for her sake,
 And thereby undergo three hells, not one—
 I who, with outlet for escape to heaven,
 Would tarry if such flight allowed my foe 2095
 To raise his head, relieved of that firm foot
 Had pinned him to the fiery pavement else !
 So am I made, " who did not make myself :"
 (How dared she rob my own lip of the word ?)
 Beware me in what other world may be !— 2100
 Pompilia, who have brought me to this pass !
 All I know here, will I say there, and go
 Beyond the saying with the deed. Some use
 There cannot but be for a mood like mine,

Implacable, persistent in revenge. 2105
 She maundered "All is over and at end :
 " I go my own road, go you where God will !
 " Forgive you ? I forget you ! " There 's the saint
 That takes your taste, you other kind of men !
 How you had loved her ! Guido wanted skill 2110
 To value such a woman at her worth !
 Properly the instructed criticize
 " What 's here, you simpleton have tossed to take
 " Its chance i' the gutter ? This a daub, indeed ?
 " Why, 't is a Rafael that you kicked to rags ! " 2115
 Perhaps so : some prefer the pure design :
 Give me my gorge of colour, glut of gold
 In a glory round the Virgin made for me !
 Titian 's the man, not Monk Angelico
 Who traces you some timid chalky ghost 2120
 That turns the church into a charnel : ay,
 Just such a pencil might depict my wife !
 She,—since she, also, would not change herself,—
 Why could not she come in some heart-shaped cloud,
 Rainbowed about with riches, royalty 2125
 Rimming her round, as round the tintless lawn
 Guardingly runs the selvage cloth of gold ?
 I would have left the faint fine gauze untouched,

Needle-worked over with its lily and rose,
 Let her bleach unmolested in the midst, 2130
 Chill that selected solitary spot
 Of quietude she pleased to think was life :
 Purity, pallor grace the lawn no doubt
 When there 's the costly bordure to unthread
 And make again an ingot : but what 's grace 2135
 When you want meat and drink and clothes and fire ?
 A tale comes to my mind that 's apposite—
 Possibly true, probably false, a truth
 Such as all truths we live by, Cardinal !
 'T is said, a certain ancestor of mine 2140
 Followed—whoever was the potentate,
 To Paynimrie, and in some battle, broke
 Through more than due allowance of the foe
 And, risking much his own life, saved the lord's.
 Battered and bruised, the Emperor scrambles up, 2145
 Rubs his eyes and looks round and sees my sire,
 Picks a furze-sprig from out his hauberk-joint,
 (Token how near the ground went majesty)
 And says " Take this, and, if thou get safe home,
 " Plant the same in thy garden-ground to grow : 2150
 " Run thence an hour in a straight line, and stop :
 " Describe a circle round (for central point)

- " The furze aforesaid, reaching every way
 " The length of that hour's run : I give it thee,—
 " The central point, to build a castle there, 2155
 " The circumjacent space, for fit demesne,
 " The whole to be thy children's heritage,—
 " Whom, for my sake, bid thou wear furze on cap !"
 Those are my arms : we turned the furze a tree
 To show more, and the greyhound tied thereto, 2160
 Straining to start, means swift and greedy both ;
 He stands upon a triple mount of gold—
 By Jove, then, he's escaping from true gold
 And trying to arrive at empty air !
 Aha ! the fancy never crossed my mind ! 2165
 My father used to tell me, and subjoin
 " As for the castle, that took wings and flew :
 " The broad lands,—why, to traverse them to-day
 " Would task my gouty feet, though in my prime
 " I doubt not I could stand and spit so far : 2170
 " But for the furze, boy, fear no lack of that,
 " So long as fortune leaves one field to grub !
 " Wherefore hurra for furze and loyalty !"
 What may I mean, where may the lesson lurk ?
 " Do not bestow on man by way of gift 2175
 " Furze without some substantial framework,—grace

- " Of purity, a furze-sprig of a wife,
 " To me, i' the thick of battle for my bread,
 " Without some better dowry,—house and land !"
 No other gift than sordid muck? Yes, Sir! 2180
 Many more and much better. Give them me !
 O those Olimpias bold, those Biancas brave,
 That brought a husband will worth Ormuz' wealth !
 Cried " Thou being mine, why, what but thine am I ?
 " Be thou to me law, right, wrong, heaven and hell !
 " Let us blend souls, be thou in me to bid 2186
 " Two bodies work one pleasure ! What are these
 " Called king, priest, father, mother, stranger, friend ?
 " They fret thee or they frustrate ? Give the word—
 " Be certain they shall frustrate nothing more ! 2190
 " And who is this young florid foolishness
 " That holds thy fortune in his pigmy clutch,
 " —Being a prince and potency, forsooth !—
 " And hesitates to let the trifle go ?
 " Let me but seal up eye, sing ear to sleep 2195
 " Sounder than Samson,—pounce thou on the prize
 " Shall slip from off my breast, and down couch-side
 " And on to floor, and far as my lord's feet—
 " Where he stands in the shadow with the sword
 " Waiting to see what Delilah dares do ! 2200

" Is the youth fair? What is a man to me
 " Who am thy call-bird? Twist his neck — my
 dupe's,—
 " Then take the breast shall turn a breast indeed !"
 Such women are there ; and they marry whom?
 Why, when a man has gone and hanged himself 2205
 Because of what he calls a wicked wife,—
 See, if the turpitude, he makes his moan,
 Be not mere excellence the fool ignores !
 His monster is perfection, Circe, sent
 Straight from the sun, with rod the idiot blames 2210
 As not an honest distaff to spin wool !
 O thou Lucrezia, is it long to wait
 Yonder where all the gloom is in a glow
 With thy suspected presence?—virgin yet,
 Virtuous again in face of what 's to teach— 2215
 Sin unimagined, unimaginable,—
 I come to claim my bride,—thy Borgia's self
 Not half the burning bridegroom I shall be !
 Cardinal, take away your crucifix !
 Abate, leave my lips alone, they bite ! 2220
 'T is vain you try to change, what should not change,
 And cannot. I have bared, you bathe my heart—
 It grows the stonier for your saving dew !

You steep the substance, you would lubricate,
 In waters that but touch to petrify ! 2225

You too are petrifications of a kind :
 Move not a muscle that shows mercy ; rave
 Another twelve hours, every word were waste !
 I thought you would not slay impenitence,—
 Teazed first contrition from the man you slew,— 2230
 I thought you had a conscience. Cardinal,
 You know I am wronged !—wronged, say, and wronged
 maintain.

Was this strict inquisition made for blood
 When first you showed us scarlet on your back,
 Called to the College ? That straightforward way 2235
 To that legitimate end,—I think it passed
 Over a scantling of heads brained, hearts broke,
 Lives trodden into dust,—how otherwise ?
 Such is the way o' the world, and so you walk :
 Does memory haunt your pillow ? Not a whit. 2240
 God wills you never pace your garden-path
 One appetizing hour ere dinner-time
 But your intrusion there treads out of life
 An universe of happy innocent things :
 Feel you remorse about that damsel-fly 2245

Which buzzed so near your mouth and flapped your face,
You blotted it from being at a blow ?

It was a fly, you were a man, and more,

Lord of created things, so took your course.

Manliness, mind,—these are things fit to save, 2250

Fit to brush fly from : why, because I take

My course, must needs the Pope kill me ?—kill you !

Because this instrument he throws away

Is strong to serve a master : it were yours

To have and hold and get such good from out ! 2255

The Pope who dooms me, needs must die next year ;

I 'll tell you how the chances are supposed

For his successor : first the Chamberlain,

Old San Cesario,—Colloredo, next,—

Then, one, two, three, four, I refuse to name, 2260

After these, comes Altieri ; then come you—

Seventh on the list you are, unless . . ha, ha,

How can a dead hand give a friend a lift ?

Are you the person to despise the help

'O' the head shall drop in pannier presently ? 2265

So a child seesaws on or kicks away

The fulcrum-stone that 's all the sage requires

To fit his lever to and move the world.

Cardinal, I adjure you in God's name,

Save my life, fall at the Pope's feet, set forth 2270
 Things your own fashion, not in words like these
 Made for a sense like yours who apprehend !
 Translate into the court-conventional
 " Count Guido must not die, is innocent !
 " Fair, be assured ! But what an he were foul, 2275
 " Blood-drenched and murder-crusted head to foot ?
 " Spare one whose death insults the Emperor,
 " And outrages the Louis you so love !
 " He has friends who will avenge him ; enemies
 " Who hate the church now with impunity 2280
 " Missing the old coercive : would you send
 " A soul straight to perdition, dying frank
 " An atheist ? " Go and say this, for God's sake !
 —Why, you don't think I hope you 'll say one word ?
 Neither shall I persuade you from your stand 2285
 Nor you persuade me from my station : take
 Your crucifix away, I tell you twice !

Come, I am tired of silence ! Pause enough !
 You have prayed : I have gone inside my soul
 And shut its door behind me : 't is your torch 2290
 Makes the place dark,—the darkness let alone
 Grows tolerable twilight,—one may grope

And get to guess at length and breadth and depth.
What is this fact I feel persuaded of—
This something like a foothold in the sea, 2295
Although Saint Peter's bark scuds, billow-borne,
Leaves me to founder where it flung me first?
Spite of your splashing, I am high and dry!
God takes his own part in each thing he made;
Made for a reason, he conserves his work, 2300
Gives each its proper instinct of defence.
My lamblike wife could neither bark nor bite,
She bleated, bleated, till for pity pure,
The village roused it, ran with pole and prong
To the rescue, and behold the wolf's at bay! 2305
Shall he try bleating?—or take turn or two,
Since the wolf owns to kinship with the fox,
And failing to escape the foe by these,
Give up attempt, die fighting quietly?
The last bad blow that strikes fire in at eye 2310
And on to brain, and so out, life and all,
How can it but be cheated of a pang
While, fighting quietly, the jaws enjoy
Their re-embrace in mid back-bone they break,
After their weary work thro' the foes' flesh? 2315
That's the wolf-nature. Do n't mistake my trope!

The Cardinal is qualmish ! Eminence,
My fight is figurative, blows i' the air,
Brain-war with powers and principalities,
Spirit-bravado, no real fisticuffs ! 2320
I shall not presently, when the knock comes,
Cling to this bench nor flee the hangman's face,
No, trust me ! I conceive worse lots than mine.
Whether it be the old contagious fit
And plague o' the prison have surprised me too, 2325
The appropriate drunkenness of the death-hour
Creep on my sense, the work o' the wine and myrrh,—
I know not,—I begin to taste my strength,
Careless, gay even : what 's the worth of life ?
The Pope is dead, my murderous old man, 2330
For Tozzi told me so : and you, forsooth—
Why, you do n't think, Abate, do your best,
You 'll live a year more with that hacking cough
And blotch of crimson where the cheek 's a pit ?
Tozzi has got you also down in book. 2335
Cardinal, only seventh of seventy near,
Is not one called Albano in the lot ?
Go eat your heart, you 'll never be a Pope !
Inform me, is it true you left your love,
A Pucci, for promotion in the church ? 2340

She's more than in the church,—in the churchyard !
 Plautilla Pucci, your affianced bride,
 Has dust now in the eyes that held the love,—
 And Martinez, suppose they make you Pope,
 Stops that with *veto*,—so, enjoy yourself ! 2345
 I see you all reel to the rock, you waves—
 Some forthright, some describe a sinuous track,
 Some crested, brilliantly with heads above,
 Some in a strangled swirl sunk who knows how,
 But all bound whither the main-current sets, 2350
 Rockward, an end in foam for all of you !
 What if I am o'ertaken, pushed to the front
 By all you crowding smoother souls behind,
 And reach, a minute sooner than was meant,
 The boundary, whereon I break to mist ? 2355
 Go to ! the smoothest safest of you all,
 Most perfect and compact wave in my train,
 Spite of the blue tranquillity above,
 Spite of the breadth before of lapsing peace
 Where broods the halcyon and the fish leaps free, 2360
 Will presently begin to feel the prick
 At lazy heart, the push at torpid brain,
 Will rock vertiginously in turn, and reel,
 And, emulative, rush to death like me :

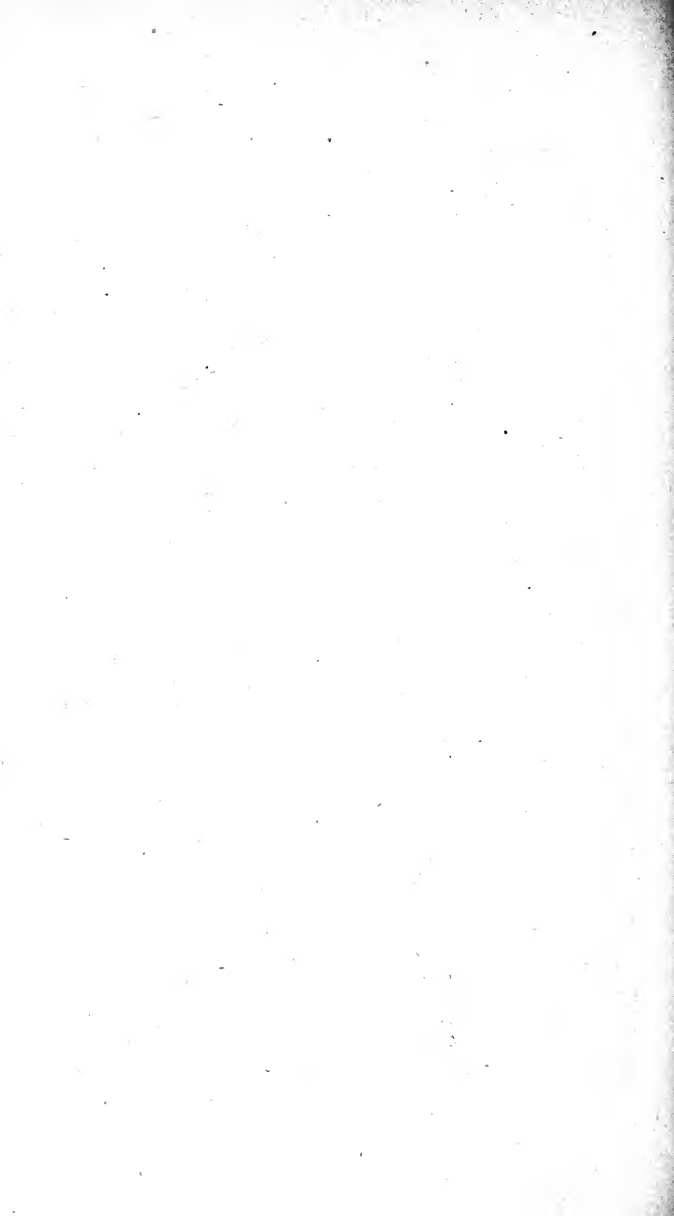
Later or sooner by a minute then, 2365
 So much for the untimeliness of death,—
 And, as regards the manner that offends,
 The rude and rough, I count the same for gain—
 Be the act harsh and quick ! Undoubtedly
 The soul 's condensed and, twice itself, expands 2370
 To burst thro' life, in alternation due,
 Into the other state whate'er it prove.
 You never know what life means till you die :
 Even throughout life, 't is death that makes life live,
 Gives it whatever the significance. 2375
 For see, on your own ground and argument,
 Suppose life had no death to fear, how find
 A possibility of nobleness
 In man, prevented daring any more ?
 What 's love, what 's faith without a worst to dread ?
 Lack-lustre jewelry ; but faith and love 2381
 With death behind them bidding do or die—
 Put such a foil at back, the sparkle 's born !
 From out myself how the strange colours come !
 Is there a new rule in another world ? 2385
 Be sure I shall resign myself : as here
 I recognized no law I could not see,
 There, what I see, I shall acknowledge too :

On earth I never took the Pope for God,
 In heaven I shall scarce take God for the Pope. 2390
 Unmanned, remade : I hold it probable—
 With something changeless at the heart of me
 To know me by, some nucleus that 's myself :
 Accretions did it wrong ? Away with them—
 You soon shall see the use of fire ! 2395

Till when,

All that was, is ; and must for ever be.
 Nor is it in me to unhate my hates,—
 I use up my last strength to strike once more
 Old Pietro in the wine-house-gossip-face, 2400
 To trample underfoot the whine and wile
 Of that Violante,—and I grow one gorge
 To loathingly reject Pompilia's pale
 Poison my hasty hunger took for food.
 A strong tree wants no wreaths about its trunk, 2405
 No cloying cups, no sickly sweet of scent,
 But sustenance at root, a bucketful.
 How else lived that Athenian who died so,
 Drinking hot bull's-blood, fit for men like me ?
 I lived and died a man, and take man's chance, 2410
 Honest and bold : right will be done to such.

Who are these you have let descend my stair?
Ha, their accursed psalm! Lights at the sill!
Is it "Open" they dare bid you? Treachery!
Sirs, have I spoken one word all this while 2415
Out of the world of words I had to say?
Not one word! All was folly—I laughed and mocked!
Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie,
Is—save me notwithstanding! Life is all!
I was just stark mad,—let the madman live 2420
Pressed by as many chains as you please pile!
Do n't open! Hold me from them! I am yours,
I am the Granduke's—no, I am the Pope's!
Abate,—Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria,—God, . . .
Pompilia, will you let them murder me? 2425



XII.

THE BOOK AND THE RING.

HERE were the end, had anything an end :
Thus, lit and launched, up and up roared and soared
A rocket, till the key o' the vault was reached,
And wide heaven held, a breathless minute-space,
In brilliant usurpature : thus caught spark, 5
Rushed to the height, and hung at full of fame
Over men's upturned faces, ghastly thence,
Our glaring Guido : now decline must be.
In its explosion, you have seen his act,
By my power—may-be, judged it by your own,— 10
Or composite as good orbs prove, or crammed
With worse ingredients than the Wormwood Star.
The act, over and ended, falls and fades :

What was once seen, grows what is now described,
 Then talked of, told about, a tinge the less 15
 In every fresh transmission ; till it melts,
 Trickles in silent orange or wan grey
 Across our memory, dies and leaves all dark,
 And presently we find the stars again.
 Follow the main streaks, meditate the mode 20
 Of brightness, how it hastes to blend with black !

After that February Twenty-Two,
 Since our salvation, Sixteen-Ninety-Eight,
 Of all reports that were, or may have been,
 Concerning those the day killed or let live, 25
 Four I count only. Take the first that comes.
 A letter from a stranger, man of rank,
 Venetian visitor at Rome,—who knows,
 On what pretence of busy idleness ?
 Thus he begins on evening of that day. 30

“ Here are we at our end of Carnival ;
 “ Prodigious gaiety and monstrous mirth,
 “ And constant shift of entertaining show :

- “ With influx, from each quarter of the globe,
“ Of strangers nowise wishful to be last 35
“ I’ the struggle for a good place presently
“ When that befalls, fate cannot long defer.
“ The old Pope totters on the verge o’ the grave :
“ You see, Malpichi understood far more
“ Than Tozzi how to treat the ailments : age, 40
“ No question, renders these inveterate.
“ Cardinal Spada, actual Minister,
“ Is possible Pope ; I wager on his head,
“ Since those four entertainments of his niece
“ Which set all Rome a-stare : Pope probably— 45
“ Though Colloredo has his backers too,
“ And San Cesario makes one doubt at times :
“ Altieri will be Chamberlain at most.
- “ A week ago the sun was warm like May,
“ And the old man took daily exercise 50
“ Along the river-side ; he loves to see
“ That Custom-house he built upon the bank,
“ For, Naples-born, his tastes are maritime :
“ But yesterday he had to keep in-doors
“ Because of the outrageous rain that fell. 55
“ On such days the good soul has fainting-fits,

- “ Or lies in stupor, scarcely makes believe
“ Of minding business, fumbles at his beads.
“ They say, the trust that keeps his heart alive
“ Is that, by lasting till December next, 60
“ He may hold Jubilee a second time,
“ And, twice in one reign, ope the Holy Doors.
“ By the way, somebody responsible
“ Assures me that the King of France has writ
“ Fresh orders : Fenelon will be condemned : 65
“ The Cardinal makes a wry face enough,
“ Having a love for the delinquent : still,
“ He ’s the ambassador, must press the point.
“ Have you a wager too dependent here ?
- “ Now, from such matters to divert awhile, 70
“ Hear of to-day’s event which crowns the week,
“ Casts all the other wagers into shade.
“ Tell Dandolo I owe him fifty drops
“ Of heart’s blood in the shape of gold zecchines !
“ The Pope has done his worst : I have to pay 75
“ For the execution of the Count, by Jove !
“ Two days since, I reported him as safe,
“ Re-echoing the conviction of all Rome :
“ Who could suspect the one deaf ear—the Pope’s ?

- “ But prejudices grow insuperable, 80
“ And that old enmity to Austria, that
“ Passion for France and France’s pageant-king
“ (Of which, why pause to multiply the proofs
“ Now scandalously rife in Europe’s mouth ?)
“ These fairly got the better in the man 85
“ Of justice, prudence, and *esprit de corps*,
“ And he persisted in the butchery.
“ Also, ’t is said that in his latest walk
“ To that Dogana-by-the-Bank, he built,
“ The crowd,—he suffers question, unrebuked,— 90
“ Asked, ‘ Whether murder was a privilege
“ ‘ Only reserved for nobles like the Count ? ’
“ And he was ever mindful of the mob.
“ Martinez, the Cæsarian Minister,
“ —Who used his best endeavours to spare blood, 95
“ And strongly pleaded for the life ‘ of one,’
“ Urged he, ‘ I may have dined at table with ! ’—
“ He will not soon forget the Pope’s rebuff,
“ —Feels the slight sensibly, I promise you !
“ And but for the dissuasion of two eyes 100
“ That make with him foul weather or fine day,
“ He had abstained, nor graced the spectacle :
“ As it was, barely would he condescend

- " Look forth from the *palchetto* where he sat
 " Under the Pincian : we shall hear of this ! 105
 " The substituting, too, the People's Square
 " For the out-o'-the-way old quarter by the Bridge,
 " Was meant as a conciliatory sop
 " To the mob ; it gave one holiday the more.
 " But the French Embassy might unfurl flag,— 110
 " Still the good luck of France to fling a foe !
 " Cardinal Bouillon triumphs properly !
 " *Palchetti* were erected in the Place,
 " And houses, at the edge of the Three Streets,
 " Let their front windows at six dollars each : 115
 " Anguisciola, that patron of the arts,
 " Hired one ; our Envoy Contarini too.
 " Now for the thing ; no sooner the decree
 " Gone forth,—'t is four-and-twenty hours ago,—
 " Than Acciaioli and Panciaticchi, 120
 " Old friends, indeed compatriots of the man,
 " Being pitched on as the couple properest
 " To intimate the sentence yesternight,
 " Were closeted ere cock-crow with the Count.
 " They both report their efforts to dispose 125
 " The unhappy nobleman for ending well,

- “ Despite the natural sense of injury,
 “ Were crowned at last with a complete success :
 “ And when the Company of Death arrived
 “ At twenty-hours,—the way they reckon here,— 130
 “ We say, at sunset, after dinner-time,—
 “ The Count was led down, hoisted up on car,
 “ Last of the five, as heinous, you know :
 “ Yet they allowed one whole car to each man.
 “ His intrepidity, nay, nonchalance, 135
 “ As up he stood and down he sat himself,
 “ Struck admiration into those who saw.
 “ Then the procession started, took the way
 “ From the New Prisons by the Pilgrim’s Street,
 “ The street of the Governo, Pasquin’s Street, 140
 “ (Where was stuck up, ’mid other epigrams,
 “ A quatrain . . . but of all that, presently !)
 “ The Place Navona, the Pantheon’s Place,
 “ Place of the Column, last the Corso’s length,
 “ And so debouched thence at Mannaia’s foot 145
 “ I’ the Place o’ the People. As is evident,
 “ (Despite the malice,—plainly meant, I fear,
 “ By this abrupt change of locality,—
 “ The Square ’s no such bad place to head and hang)
 “ We had the titillation as we sat 150

- “ Assembled, (quality in conclave, ha?)
“ Of, minute after minute, some report
“ How the slow show was winding on its way.
“ Now did a car run over, kill a man,
“ Just opposite a pork-shop numbered Twelve : 155
“ And bitter were the outcries of the mob
“ Against the Pope : for, but that he forbids
“ The Lottery, why, twelve were Tern Quatern !
“ Now did a beggar by Saint Agnes, lame
“ From his youth up, recover use of leg, 160
“ Through prayer of Guido as he glanced that way :
“ So that the crowd near crammed his hat with coin.
“ Thus was kept up excitement to the last,
“ —Not an abrupt out-bolting, as of yore,
“ From Castle, over Bridge and on to block, 165
“ And so all ended ere you well could wink !
- “ Guido was last to mount the scaffold-steps
“ Here also, as atrociouslest in crime.
“ We hardly noticed how the peasants died,
“ They dangled somehow soon to right and left, 170
“ And we remained all ears and eyes, could give
“ Ourselves to Guido undividedly,
“ As he harangued the multitude beneath.

- “ He begged forgiveness on the part of God,
“ And fair construction of his act from men, 175
“ Whose suffrage he entreated for his soul,
“ Suggesting that we should forthwith repeat
“ A *Pater* and an *Ave*, with the hymn
“ *Salve Regina Cæli*, for his sake.
“ Which said, he turned to the confessor, crossed 180
“ And reconciled himself, with decency,
“ Oft glancing at Saint Mary’s opposite
“ Where they possess, and showed in shrine to-day,
“ The Blessed *Umbilicus* of our Lord,
“ (A relic ’t is believed no other church 185
“ In Rome can boast of)—then rose up, as brisk
“ Knelt down again, bent head, adapted neck,
“ And, with the name of Jesus on his lips,
“ Received the fatal blow.
“ The headsman showed 190
“ The head to the populace. Must I avouch
“ We strangers own to disappointment here?
“ Report pronounced him fully six feet high,
“ Youngish, considering his fifty years,
“ And, if not handsome, dignified at least. 195
“ Indeed, it was no face to please a wife!

" His friends say, this was caused by the costume :
 " He wore the dress he did the murder in,
 " That is, a *just-a-corps* of russet serge,
 " Black camisole, coarse cloak of baracan 200
 " (So they style here the garb of goat's-hair cloth)
 " White hat and cotton cap beneath, poor Count,
 " Preservative against the evening dews
 " During the journey from Arezzo. Well,
 " So died the man, and so his end was peace ; 205
 " Whence many a moral were to meditate.
 " Spada,—you may bet Dandolo,—is Pope !
 " Now for the quatrain !"

No, friend, this will do !

You 've sputtered into sparks. What streak comes next ?
 A letter : Don Giacinto Arcangeli, 211
 Doctor and Proctor, him I made you mark
 Buckle to business in his study late,
 The virtuous sire, the valiant for the truth,
 Acquaints his correspondent,—Florentine, 215
 By name Cencini, advocate as well,
Socius and brother-in-the-devil to match,—

A friend of Franceschini, anyhow,
And knit up with the bowels of the case,—
Acquaints him, (in this paper that I touch) 220
How their joint effort to obtain reprieve
For Guido had so nearly nicked the nine
And ninety and one over,—he would say,
At Tarocs,—or succeeded,—in our phrase.
To this Cencini's care I owe the Book, 225
The yellow thing I take and toss once more
—How will it be, my four-years'-intimate,
When thou and I part company anon?—
'T was he, the "whole position of the case,"
Pleading and summary, were put before; 230
Discreetly in my Book he bound them all,
Adding some three epistles to the point.
Here is the first of these, part fresh as penned,
The sand, that dried the ink, not rubbed away,
Though penned the day whereof it tells the deed: 235
Part—extant just as plainly, you know where,
Whence came the other stuff, went, you know how,
To make the ring that's all but round and done.

- " Late they arrived, too late, egregious Sir,
 " Those same justificative points you urge 240
 " Might benefit His Blessed Memory
 " Count Guido Franceschini now with God :
 " Since the Court,—to state things succinctly,—styled
 " The Congregation of the Governor,
 " Having resolved on Tuesday last our cause 245
 " I' the guilty sense, with death for punishment,
 " Spite of all pleas by me deducible
 " In favour of said Blessed Memory,—
 " I, with expenditure of pains enough,
 " Obtained a respite, leave to claim and prove 250
 " Exemption from the law's award,—alleged
 " The power and privilege o' the Clericate :
 " To which effect a courier was despatched.
 " But ere an answer from Arezzo came,
 " The Holiness of our Lord the Pope (prepare !) 255
 " Judging it inexpedient to postpone
 " The execution of such sentence passed,
 " Saw fit, by his particular chirograph,
 " To derogate, dispense with privilege,
 " And wink at any hurt accruing thence 260
 " To Mother Church through damage of her son ;
 " Also, to overpass and set aside

- “ That other plea on score of tender age,
 “ Put forth by me to do Pasquini good,
 “ One of the four in trouble with our friend. 265
 “ So that all five, to-day, have suffered death
 “ With no distinction save in dying,—he,
 “ Decollated by way of privilege,
 “ The rest hanged decently and in order. Thus
 “ Came the Count to his end of gallant man, 270
 “ Defunct in faith and exemplarity :
 “ Nor shall the shield of his great House lose shine,
 “ Nor its blue banner blush to red thereby.
 “ This, too, should yield sustainment to our hearts—
 “ He had commiseration and respect 275
 “ In his decease from universal Rome,
 “ *Quantum est hominum venustiorum,*
 “ The nice and cultivated everywhere :
 “ Though, in respect of me his advocate,
 “ Needs must I groan o’er my debility, 280
 “ Attribute the untoward event o’ the strife
 “ To nothing but my own crass ignorance
 “ Which failed to set the valid reasons forth,
 “ Find fit excuse : such is the fate of war !
 “ May God compensate us the direful blow 285
 “ By future blessings on his family

“ Whereof I lowly beg the next commands ;
 “ —Whereto, as humbly, I confirm myself . . . ”

And so forth,—follow name and place and date :
 On the next leaf—

290

“ *Hactenus senioribus !*

“ There, old fox, show the clients t’ other side
 “ And keep this corner sacred, I beseech !
 “ You and your pleas and proofs were what folks call
 “ Pisan assistance, aid that comes too late, 295
 “ Saves a man dead as nail in post of door.
 “ Had I but time and space for narrative !
 “ What was the good of twenty Clericates
 “ When Somebody’s thick headpiece once was bent
 “ On seeing Guido’s drop into the bag ? 300
 “ How these old men like giving youth a push !
 “ So much the better : next push goes to him,
 “ And a new Pope begins the century.
 “ Much good I get by my superb defence !
 “ But argument is solid and subsists, 305
 “ While obstinacy and ineptitude
 “ Accompany the owner to his tomb ;
 “ What do I care how soon ? Beside, folks see !
 “ Rome will have relished heartily the show,

- " Yet understood the motives, never fear, 310
 " Which caused the indecent, change o' the People's
 Place
 " To the People's Playground,—stigmatize the spite
 " Which in a trice precipitated things !
 " As oft the moribund will give a kick
 " To show they are not absolutely dead, 315
 " So feebleness i' the socket shoots its last,
 " A spirt of violence for energy !

 " But thou, Cencini, brother of my breast,
 " O fox, whose home is 'mid the tender grape,
 " Whose couch in Tuscany by Themis' throne, 320
 " Subject to no such . . . but I shut my mouth
 " Or only open it again to say,
 " This pother and confusion fairly laid,
 " My hands are empty and my satchel lank.
 " Now then for both the Matrimonial Cause 325
 " And the case of Gomez ! Serve them hot and hot !

 " *Reliqua differamus in crastinum !*
 " The impatient estafette cracks whip outside :
 " Still, though the earth should swallow him who swears
 " And me who make the mischief, in must slip 330

“ —My boy, your godson, fat-chaps Hyacinth,
 “ Enjoyed the sight while Papa plodded here.
 “ I promised him, the rogue, a month ago,
 “ The day his birthday was, of all the days,
 “ That if I failed to save Count Guido’s head, 335
 “ Cinuccio should at least go see it chopped
 “ From trunk—‘ So, latinize your thanks !’ quoth I :
 “ ‘ That I prefer, *hoc malim,*’ raps me out
 “ The rogue : you notice the subjunctive? Ah !
 “ Accordingly he sat there, bold in box, 340
 “ Proud as the Pope behind the peacock-fans :
 “ Whereon a certain lady-patroness
 “ For whom I manage things (my boy in front,
 “ Her Marquis sat the third in evidence ;
 “ Boys have no eyes nor ears save for the show) 345
 “ ‘ This time, Cintino,’ was her sportive word,
 “ When whiz and thump went axe and mowed lay man,
 “ And folks could fall to the suspended chat,
 “ ‘ This time, you see, Bottini rules the roast,
 “ ‘ Nor can Papa with all his eloquence 350
 “ ‘ Be reckoned on to help as heretofore !’
 “ Whereat Cinone pouts ; then, sparkishly—
 “ ‘ Papa knew better than aggrieve his Pope,
 “ ‘ And baulk him of his grudge against our Count,

- “ ‘ Else he ’d have argued-off Bottini’s ’ . . what? 355
 “ ‘ His nose,’—the rogue ! well parried of the boy !
 “ He ’s long since out of Cæsar (eight years old)
 “ And as for tripping in Eutropius . . well,
 “ Reason the more that we strain every nerve
 “ To do him justice, mould a model-mouth, 360
 “ A Bartolus-cum-Baldo for next age :
 “ For that I purse the pieces, work the brain,
 “ And want both Gomez and the marriage-case,
 “ Success with which shall plaster aught of pate
 “ That ’s broken in me by Bottini’s flail, 365
 “ And bruise his own, belike, that wags and brags.
 “ *Adverti supplico humiliter*
 “ *Quod*, do n’t the fungus see, the fop divine
 “ That one hand drives two horses, left and right ?
 “ With this rein did I rescue from the ditch 370
 “ The fortune of our Franceschini, keep
 “ Unsplashed the credit of a noble House,
 “ And set the fashionable cause of Rome
 “ A-prancing till bystanders shouted ‘ ’ware !’
 “ The other rein’s judicious management 375
 “ Suffered old Somebody to keep the pace,
 “ Hobblingly play the roadster : who but he
 “ Had his opinion, was not led by the nose

- “ In leash of quibbles strung to look like law !
 “ You ’ll soon see,—when I go to pay devoir 380
 “ And compliment him on confuting me,—
 “ If, by a back-swing of the pendulum,
 “ Grace be not, thick and threefold, consequent !
 “ “ I must decide as I see proper, Don !
 “ “ The Pope, I have my inward lights for guide. 385
 “ “ Had learning been the matter in dispute,
 “ “ Could eloquence avail to gainsay fact,
 “ “ Yours were the victory, be comforted !’
 “ Cinuzzo will be gainer by it all.
 “ Quick then with Gomez, hot and hot next case !” 390

Follows, a letter, takes the other side.

Tall blue-eyed Fisc whose head is capped with cloud,
 Doctor Bottini,—to no matter who,
 Writes on the Monday two days afterward.
 Now shall the honest championship of right, 395
 Crowned with success, enjoy at last, unblamed,
 Moderate triumph ! Now shall eloquence
 Poured forth in fancied floods for virtue’s sake,
 (The print is sorrowfully dyked and dammed,

But shows where fain the unbridled force would flow, 400
 Finding a channel)—now shall this refresh
 The thirsty donor with a drop or two !
 Here has been truth at issue with a lie :
 Let who gained truth the day have handsome pride
 In his own prowess ! Eh ? What ails the man ? 405

“ Well, it is over, ends as I foresaw :

“ Easily proved, Pompilia’s innocence !

“ Catch them entrusting Guido’s guilt to me !

“ I had, as usual, the plain truth to plead.

“ I always knew the clearness of the stream 410

“ Would show the fish so thoroughly, child might prong

“ The clumsy monster : with no mud to splash,

“ Small credit to lynx-eye and lightning-spear !

“ This Guido,—(much sport he contrived to make,

“ Who at first twist, preamble of the cord, 415

“ Turned white, told all, like the poltroon he was !)—

“ Finished, as you expect, a penitent,

“ Fully confessed his crime, and made amends,

“ And, edifying Rome last Saturday,

“ Died like a saint, poor devil ! That ’s the man 420

- " The gods still give to my antagonist :
 " Imagine how Arcangeli claps wing,
 " And crows ! ' Such formidable facts to face,
 " ' So naked to attack, my client here,
 " ' And yet I kept a month the Fisc at bay, 425
 " ' And in the end had foiled him of the prize
 " ' By this arch-stroke, this plea of privilege,
 " ' But that the Pope must gratify his whim,
 " ' Put in his word, poor old man,—let it pass !'
 " —Such is the cue to which all Rome responds. 430
 " What with the plain truth given me to uphold,
 " And, should I let truth slip, the Pope at hand
 " To pick up, steady her on legs again,
 " My office turns a pleasantry indeed !
 " Not that the burly boaster did one jot 435
 " O' the little was to do—young Spreti's work !
 " But for him,—mannikin and dandiprat,
 " Mere candle-end and inch of cleverness
 " Stuck on Arcangeli's save-all,—but for him
 " The spruce young Spreti, what is bad were worse ! 440
 " I looked that Rome should have the natural gird
 " At advocate with case that proves itself ;
 " I knew Arcangeli would grin and brag :

“ But what say you to one impertinence
“ Might move a man? That monk, you are to know,
“ That barefoot Augustinian whose report 446
“ O’ the dying woman’s words did detriment
“ To my best points it took the freshness from,
“ —That meddler preached to purpose yesterday
“ At San Lorenzo as a winding-up 450
“ O’ the shows, have proved a treasure to the church.
“ Out comes his sermon smoking from the press :
“ Its text—‘ Let God be true, and every man
“ ‘ A liar ’—and its application, this,
“ The longest-winded of the paragraphs, 455
“ I straight unstitch, tear out and treat you with :
“ ’T is piping hot and posts through Rome to-day.
“ Remember it, as I engage to do !

“ But if you rather be disposed to see
“ In the result of the long trial here,— 460
“ This dealing doom to guilt and doling praise
“ To innocency,—any proof that truth
“ May look for vindication from the world,
“ Much will you have misread the signs, I say.

- “ God, who seems acquiescent in the main . . . 465
 “ With those who add ‘ So will He ever sleep ’—
 “ Flutters their foolishness from time to time,
 “ Puts forth His right-hand recognizably ;
 “ Even as, to fools who deem He needs must right
 “ Wrong on the instant, as if earth were heaven, . . . 470
 “ He wakes remonstrance—‘ Passive, Lord, how long ? ’
 “ Because Pompilia’s purity prevails,
 “ Conclude you, all truth triumphs in the end ?
 “ So might those old inhabitants of the ark,
 “ Witnessing haply their dove’s safe return, . . . 475
 “ Pronounce there was no danger all the while
 “ O’ the deluge, to the creature’s counterparts,
 “ Aught that beat wing i’ the world, was white or soft,—
 “ And that the lark, the thrush, the culver too,
 “ Might equally have traversed air, found earth, . . . 480
 “ And brought back olive-branch in unharmed bill.
 “ Methinks I hear the Patriarch’s warning voice—
 “ ‘ Though this one breast, by miracle, return,
 “ ‘ No wave rolls by, in all the waste, but bears
 “ ‘ Within it some dead dove-like thing as dear, . . . 485
 “ ‘ Beauty made blank and harmlessness destroyed ! ’
 “ How many chaste and noble sister-fames
 “ Wanted the extricating hand, and lie

- “ Strangled, for one Pompilia proud above
 “ The welter, plucked from the world’s calumny, 490
 “ Stupidity, simplicity,—who cares ?
- “ Romans ! An elder race possessed your land
 “ Long ago, and a false faith lingered still,
 “ As shades do, though the morning-star be out.
 “ Doubtless, some pagan of the twilight-day 495
 “ Has often pointed to a cavern-mouth,
 “ Obnoxious to beholders, hard by Rome,
 “ And said,—nor he a bad man, no, nor fool,—
 “ Only a man, so, blind like all his mates,—
 “ ‘ Here skulk in safety, lurk, defying law, 500
 “ ‘ The devotees to execrable creed,
 “ ‘ Adoring—with what culture . . . Jove, avert
 “ ‘ Thy vengeance from us worshippers of thee ! . . .
 “ ‘ What rites obscene—their idol-god, an Ass !’
 “ So went the word forth, so acceptance found, 505
 “ So century re-echoed century,
 “ Cursed the accursed,—and so, from sire to son,
 “ You Romans cried ‘ The offscourings of our race
 “ ‘ Corrupt within the depths there : fitly, fiends
 “ ‘ Perform a temple-service o’er the dead : 510
 “ ‘ Child, gather garment round thee, pass nor pry !’

- " So groaned your generations : till the time
 " Grew ripe, and lightning hath revealed, belike,—
 " Thro' crevice peeped into by curious fear,—
 " Some object even fear could recognize 515
 " I' the place of spectres ; on the illumined wall,
 " To-wit, some nook, tradition talks about,
 " Narrow and short, a corpse's length, no more :
 " And by it, in the due receptacle,
 " The little rude brown lamp of earthenware, 520
 " The cruse, was meant for flowers, but held the blood,
 " The rough-scratched palm-branch, and the legend left
 " *Pro Christo*. Then the mystery lay clear :
 " The abhorred one was a martyr all the time,
 " A saint whereof earth was not worthy. What? 525
 " Do you continue in the old belief?
 " Where blackness bides unbroke, must devils be?
 " Is it so certain, not another cell
 " O' the myriad that make up the catacomb,
 " Contains some saint a second flash would show? 530
 " Will you ascend into the light of day
 " And, having recognized a martyr's shrine,
 " Go join the votaries that gape around
 " Each vulgar god that awes the market-place?
 " Be these the objects of your praising? See! 535

- “ In the outstretched right hand of Apollo, there,
“ Is screened a scorpion : housed amid the folds
“ Of Juno’s mantle, lo, a cockatrice !
“ Each statue of a god were fitlier styled
“ Demon and devil. Glorify no brass 540
“ That shines like burnished gold in noonday glare,
“ For fools ! Be otherwise instructed, you !
“ And preferably ponder, ere ye pass,
“ Each incident of this strange human play
“ Privily acted on a theatre, 545
“ Was deemed secure from every gaze but God’s,—
“ Till, of a sudden, earthquake lays wall low
“ And lets the world see the wild work inside,
“ And how, in petrification of surprise,
“ The actors stand,—raised arm and planted foot,— 550
“ Mouth as it made, eye as it evidenced,
“ Despairing shriek, triumphant hate,—transfixed,
“ Both he who takes and she who yields the life.
- “ As ye become spectators of this scene—
“ Watch obscuration of a fame pearl-pure 555
“ In vapoury films, enwoven circumstance,
“ —A soul made weak by its pathetic want
“ Of just the first apprenticeship to sin,

- " Would thenceforth make the sinning soul secure
 " From all foes save itself, that 's truliest foe,— 560
 " For egg turned snake needs fear no serpentry,—
 " As ye behold this web of circumstance
 " Deepen the more for every thrill and throe,
 " Convulsive effort to disperse the films
 " And disenmesh the fame o' the martyr,—mark 565
 " How all those means, the unfriended one pursues,
 " To keep the treasure trusted to her breast,
 " Each struggle in the flight from death to life,
 " How all, by procuration of the powers
 " Of darkness, are transformed,—no single ray, 570
 " Shot forth to show and save the inmost star,
 " But, passed as through hell's prism, proceeding black
 " To the world that hates white : as ye watch, I say,
 " Till dusk and such defacement grow eclipse
 " By,—marvellous perversity of man !— 575
 " The inadequacy and inaptitude
 " Of that self-same machine, that very law
 " Man vaunts, devised to dissipate the gloom,
 " Rescue the drowning orb from calumny,
 " —Hear law, appointed to defend the just, 580
 " Submit, for best defence, that wickedness
 " Was bred of flesh and innate with the bone

- “ Borne by Pompilia’s spirit for a space,
 “ And no mere chance fault, passionate and brief :
 “ Finally, when ye find,—after this touch 585
 “ Of man’s protection which intends to mar
 “ The last pin-point of light and damn the disc,—
 “ One wave of the hand of God amid the worlds
 “ Bid vapour vanish, darkness flee away,
 “ And leave the vexed star culminate in peace 590
 “ Approachable no more by earthly mist—
 “ What I call God’s hand,—you, perhaps,—this chance
 “ Of the true instinct of an old good man
 “ Who happens to hate darkness and love light,—
 “ In whom too was the eye that saw, not dim, 595
 “ The natural force to do the thing he saw,
 “ Nowise abated,—both by miracle,—
 “ All this well pondered,—I demand assent
 “ To the enunciation of my text
 “ In face of one proof more that ‘ God is true 600
 “ ‘ And every man a liar ’—that who trusts
 “ To human testimony for a fact
 “ Gets this sole fact—himself is proved a fool ;
 “ Man’s speech being false, if but by consequence
 “ That only strength is true ; while man is weak, 605
 “ And, since truth seems reserved for heaven not earth,

“ Should learn to love what he may speak one day.

“ For me, the weary and the worn, who prompt

“ To mirth or pity, as I move the mood,—

“ A friar who glide unnoticed to the grave, 610

“ Bare feet, coarse robe and rope-girt waist of mine,—

“ I have long since renounced your world, ye know :

“ Yet weigh the worth of worldly prize foregone,

“ Disinterestedly judge this and that

“ Good ye account good : but God tries the heart. 615

“ Still, if you question me of my content

“ At having put each human pleasure by,

“ I answer, at the urgency of truth,

“ As this world seems, I dare not say I know

“ —Apart from Christ's assurance which decides— 620

“ Whether I have not failed to taste some joy.

“ For many a dream would fain perturb my choice—

“ How love, in those the varied shapes, might show

“ As glory, or as rapture, or as grace :

“ How conversancy with the books that teach, 625

“ The arts that help,—how, to grow great, in fine,

“ Rather than simply good, and bring thereby

“ Goodness to breathe and live, nor, born i' the brain,

“ Die there,—how these and many another gift

- " May well be precious though abjured by me. 630
 " But, for one prize, best meed of mightiest man,
 " Arch-object of ambition,—earthly praise,
 " Repute o' the world, the flourish of loud trump,
 " The softer social fluting,—Oh, for these,
 " —No, my friends ! Fame,—that bubble which, world-
 wide 635
 " Each blows and bids his neighbour lend a breath,
 " That so he haply may behold thereon
 " One more enlarged distorted false fool's-face,
 " Until some glassy nothing grown as big
 " Send by a touch the imperishable to suds,— 640
 " No, in renouncing fame, the loss was light,
 " Choosing obscurity, the chance was well ! "

Didst ever touch such ampollosity
 As the man's own bubble, let alone its spite ?
 What 's his speech for, but just the fame he flouts— 645
 How he dares reprehend both high and low ?
 Else had he turned the sentence " God is true
 " And every man a liar—save the Pope
 " Happily reigning—my respects to him ! "

—So, rounded off the period. Molinism 650
 Simple and pure! To what pitch get we next?
 I find that, for first pleasant consequence,
 Gomez, who had intended to appeal
 From the absurd decision of the Court,
 Declines, though plain enough his privilege, 655
 To call on help from lawyers any more—
 Resolves the liars may possess the world,
 Till God have had sufficiency of both :
 So may I whistle for my job and fee !

But, for this virulent and rabid monk,— 660
 If law be an inadequate machine,
 And advocacy, so much impotence,
 We shall soon see, my blatant brother! That 's
 Exactly what I hope to show your sort!
 For, by a veritable piece of luck, 665
 True providence, you monks round period with,
 All may be gloriously retrieved. Perpend !

That Monastery of the Convertites
 Whereto the Court consigned Pompilia first,
 —Observe, if convertite, why, sinner then, 670
 Or where the pertinency of award?—

And whither she was late returned to die,
 —Still in their jurisdiction, mark again !—
 That thrifty Sisterhood, for perquisite,
 Claims every paul whereof may die possessed 675
 Each sinner in the circuit of its walls.
 Now, this Pompilia, seeing that by death
 O' the couple, all their wealth devolved on her,
 Straight utilized the respite ere decease
 By regular conveyance of the goods 680
 She thought her own, to will and to devise,—
 Gave all to friends, Tighetti and the like,
 In trust for him she held her son and heir,
 Gaetano,—trust to end with infancy :
 So willing and devising, since assured 685
 The justice of the Court would presently
 Confirm her in her rights and exculpate,
 Re-integrate and rehabilitate—
 Station as, through my pleading, now she stands.
 But here 's the capital mistake : the Court 690
 Found Guido guilty,—but pronounced no word
 About the innocency of his wife :
 I grounded charge on broader base, I hope !
 No matter whether wife be true or false,
 The husband must not push aside the law, 695

And punish of a sudden : that 's the point !
 Gather from out my speech the contrary !
 It follows that Pompilia, unrelieved
 By formal sentence from imputed fault,
 Remains unfit to have and to dispose 700
 Of property, which law provides shall lapse :
 Wherefore the Monastery claims its due.
 And whose, pray, whose the office, but the Fisc's ?
 Who but I institute procedure next
 Against the person of dishonest life, 705
 Pompilia, whom last week I sainted so ?
 I, it is, teach the monk what scripture means,
 And that the tongue should prove a two-edged sword,
 No axe sharp one side, blunt the other way,
 Like what amused the town at Guido's cost ! 710
Astræa redux ! I've a second chance
 Before the self-same Court o' the Governor
 Who soon shall see volte-face and chop, change sides !
 Accordingly, I charge you on your life,
 Send me with all despatch the judgment late 715
 O' the Florence Rota Court, confirmative
 O' the prior judgment at Arezzo, clenched
 Again by the Granducal signature,
 Wherein Pompilia is convicted, doomed,

And only destined to escape through flight 720
 The proper punishment. Send me the piece,—
 I'll work it! And this foul-mouthed friar shall find
 His Noah's-dove that brought the olive back,
 Is turned into the other sooty scout,
 The raven, Noah first of all put forth the ark, 725
 And never came back, but ate carcasses!
 No adequate machinery in law?
 No power of life and death i' the learned tongue?
 Methinks I am already at my speech,
 Startle the world with "Thou, Pompilia, thus? 730
 "How is the fine gold of the Temple dim!"
 And so forth. But the courier bids me close,
 And clip away one joke that runs through Rome,
 Side by side with the sermon which I send—
 How like the heartlessness of the old hunks 735
 Arcangeli! His Count is hardly cold,
 His client whom his blunders sacrificed,
 When somebody must needs describe the scene—
 How the procession ended at the church
 That boasts the famous relic: quoth our brute, 740
 "Why, that's just Martial's phrase for 'make an
 end'—

"*Ad umbilicum sic perventum est!*"

The callous dog,—let who will cut off head,
 He cuts a joke, and cares no more than so!
 I think my speech shall modify his mirth : 745
 “ How is the fine gold dim ! ”—but send the piece !

Alack, Bottini, what is my next word
 But death to all that hope? The Instrument
 Is plain before me, print that ends my Book
 With the definitive verdict of the Court, 750
 Dated September, six months afterward,
 (Such trouble and so long, the old Pope gave !)
 “ In restitution of the perfect fame
 “ Of dead Pompilia, *quondam* Guido’s wife,
 “ And warrant to her representative 755
 “ Domenico Tighetti, barred hereby,
 “ While doing duty in his guardianship,
 “ From all molesting, all disquietude,
 “ Each perturbation and vexation brought
 “ Or threatened to be brought against the heir 760
 “ By the Most Venerable Convent called
 “ Saint Mary Magdalen o’ the Convertites
 “ I’ the Corso.”

Justice done a second time !

Well judged, Marc Antony, *Locum-tenens* 765
 O' the Governor, a Venturini too !
 For which I save thy name,—last of the list !

Next year but one, completing his nine years
 Of rule in Rome, died Innocent my Pope
 —By some accounts, on his accession-day. 770
 If he thought doubt would do the next age good,
 'T is pity he died unapprised what birth
 His reign may boast of, be remembered by—
 Terrible Pope, too, of a kind,—Voltaire.

And so an end of all i' the story. Strain 775
 Never so much my eyes, I miss the mark
 There lived or died that Gaetano, child
 Of Guido and Pompilia : only find,
 Immediately upon his father's death,
 A record in the annals of the town 780
 That Porzia, sister of our Guido, moved
 The Priors of Arezzo and their head
 Its Gonfalonier to give loyally
 A public attestation to the right
 O' the Franceschini to men's reverence— 785

Apparently because of the incident
 O' the murder,—there 's no mention made of crime,
 But what else caused such urgency to cure
 The mob, just then, of chronic greediness
 For scandal, love of lying vanity, 790
 And appetite to swallow crude reports
 That bring annoyance to their betters?—Bane
 Which, here, was promptly met by antidote.
 I like and shall translate the eloquence
 Of nearly the worst Latin ever writ : 795
 “ Since antique time whereof the memory
 “ Holds the beginning, to this present hour,
 “ Our Franceschini ever shone, and shine,
 “ Still i' the primary rank, supreme amid
 “ The lustres of Arezzo, proud to own 800
 “ In this great family—her flag-bearer,
 “ Guide of her steps and guardian against foe,—
 “ As in the first beginning, so to-day !”
 There, would you disbelieve stern History,
 Trust rather to the babble of a bard ? 805
 I thought, Arezzo, thou hadst fitter souls,
 Petrarch,—nay, Buonarroti at a pinch,
 To do thee credit as *vexillifer* !
 Was it mere mirth the Patavinian meant,

Making thee out, in his veracious page, 810
Founded by Janus of the Double Face ?

Well, proving of such perfect parentage,
Our Gaetano, born of love and hate,
Did the babe live or die?—one fain would find !
What were his fancies if he grew a man ? 815
Was he proud,—a true scion of the stock,—
Of bearing blason, shall make bright my Book—
Shield, Azure, on a Triple Mountain, Or,
A Palm-tree, Proper, whereunto is tied
A Greyhound, Rampant, striving in the slips ? 820
Or did he love his mother, the base-born,
And fight i' the ranks, unnoticed by the world ?

Such, then, the final state o' the story. So
Did the Star Wormwood in a blazing fall
Frighten awhile the waters and lie lost : 825
So did this old woe fade from memory,
Till after, in the fulness of the days,
I needs must find an ember yet unquenched,
And, breathing, blow the spark to flame. It lives,
If precious be the soul of man to man. 830

So, British Public, who may like me yet,
(Marry and amen !) learn one lesson hence
Of many which whatever lives should teach :
This lesson, that our human speech is naught,
Our human testimony false, our fame 835
And human estimation words and wind.
Why take the artistic way to prove so much ?
Because, it is the glory and good of Art,
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine, at least. 840
How look a brother in the face and say
“ Thy right is wrong, eyes hast thou yet art blind,
“ Thine ears are stuffed and stopped, despite their length,
“ And, oh, the foolishness thou countest faith ! ”
Say this as silverly as tongue can troll— 845
The anger of the man may be endured,
The shrug, the disappointed eyes of him
Are not so bad to bear—but here ’s the plague
That all this trouble comes of telling truth,
Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false, 850
Seems to be just the thing it would supplant,
Nor recognizable by whom it left—
While falsehood would have done the work of truth.
But Art,—wherein man nowise speaks to men,

Only to mankind,—Art may tell a truth 855
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.
So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—
So, note by note, bring music from your mind, 860
Deeper than ever the Andante dived,—
So write a book shall mean, beyond the facts,
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

And save the soul! If this intent save mine,—
If the rough ore be rounded to a ring, 865
Render all duty which good ring should do,
And, failing grace, succeed in guardianship,—
Might mine but lie outside thine, Lyric Love,
Thy rare gold ring of verse (the poet praised)
Linking our England to his Italy! 870

PKA2M
1868/1
Vol. 1
V.H

LONDON:
PRINTED BY SMITH, ELDER AND CO.,
OLD BAILEY, E.C.



